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GRAND MAN



Norman Douglas on Capri (Islay Lyons)

1949

Grand Man

Memories of
NORMAN DOUGLAS

by
Nancy Cunard

*With Extracts from his Letters,
and Appreciations by*
KENNETH MACPHERSON, HAROLD ACTON,
ARTHUR JOHNSON, CHARLES DUFF, and
VICTOR CUNARD

and a Bibliographical Note by
CECIL WOOLF

London : SECKER & Warburg : 1954

*Made and printed in Great Britain by
William Clowes and Sons, Limited
London and Beccles
and
first published
1954
by
Martin Secker & Warburg Limited
7 John Street, London, W.C.1*

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Author's Note

THIS is no baron of beef on the score of Norman Douglas, no attempt at any kind of biography—as some imagine must be the case directly a person feels impelled to set down a few words about another. “I like to taste my friends but not to eat them,” is an excellent remark of his own. And he has written enchantingly and with finality about himself.

Now that I can begin to think of him in perspective, all of my reminiscing seems connected, somehow, with the sound of his voice. So much of his personality lay therein: one might even hazard that his way of speaking was a mirror to his character. Can I call my words mainly a series of echoes, disjointed though inter-related throughout the nigh-on thirty years it was my joy to know him?

“Every book is, in an intimate sense, a circular letter to the friends of him who writes it,” says Robert Louis Stevenson’s dedication to Sidney Colvin of his *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*.

If it succeed in its aim, then it is an evocation with something almost physical about it. My attempt is in reality addressed to all. It has seemed to me that such radiant humanism as Douglas’s might be recorded (if properly recorded it can be!) as a corollary to the great pleasure one derives from reading his books. And why have all my personal memories, at such points where our lives touched and we were together, seemed to insist within me on addressing themselves to him? I cannot tell.

What image arises at the mention of Norman Douglas?

That of a master of modern prose—a great individualist—a free spirit—a salubrious iconoclast. Is he thought of sufficiently as the

Author's Note

man of profound and perfect taste that he was? As the connoisseur who developed out of the youthful scientist and scholar? After some months spent in re-reading all of his twenty-four books, I am not sure that Douglas's spirit of critical reasoning is not the aspect of him which impresses one the most of all—*wherever it is manifest*. The innate feeling in him for things fine and true was always expressed with magnificent and arresting lucidity. The opposite drew his masterly lancet-stroke. And there was in him to a phenomenal degree that nature-force which is *humour*.

To him the categorical "labelling" of anything was detestable, but if one be searching for his dominant characteristic I think that "Douglas the humanist" is exact.

There are several most welcome contributions here from friends of his—from Kenneth Macpherson and Harold Acton, from Arthur Johnson, Charles Duff and Victor Cunard, and a Bibliographical Note by Cecil Woolf, to whom I am indebted for his aid in verifying certain data.

To these, to his literary executors Kenneth Macpherson and William King for permission to quote such letters from Douglas to me as are reproduced, to Islay Lyons and Constantine FitzGibbon for their excellent photographs, to Roger Senhouse for having made such a good Index, and to his publishers for the inclusion of some extracts from his works are tendered all due and grateful thanks.

NANCY CUNARD

France—Italy—France—England

1952-1953

Chronology of Norman Douglas 1868-1952

(Collated mainly from his own *Looking Back*, Constantine Fitz-Gibbon's *Norman Douglas, A Pictorial Record*, the *Times Literary Supplement* of July 4, 1952, John Davenport's article "Norman Douglas" in the *XXth Century*, April 1952, and verified with Mr Kenneth Macpherson, his literary executor.)

1868 George Norman Douglas was born on December 8, at Falkenhorst, Thüringen, Austria, and was, by blood, three-quarters Scottish and one-quarter German. His maternal grandfather, Baron Ernst von Poelnitz, had married a daughter of the 17th Lord Forbes, premier baron of Scotland; their eldest daughter was Norman Douglas's mother, (half Scot, half German). The German side of the family came originally from Schloss Frankenstein in Franconia. His paternal, Scottish grandfather, married to a Miss Kennedy, had started cotton mills on the banks of the Montiola stream at Bregenz in the Vorarlberg. Here his son John Sholto Douglas, 15th Laird of Tilquhillie, the father of Norman and of two other children, became manager. He was killed by a fall while chamois-hunting in 1874, when Norman was six years old: his widow later married Jakob Jehly, an artist from nearby Liechtenstein.

The family seat in Scotland was Tilquhillie Castle, near Banchory, Aberdeen, and Douglas saw it first at the age of six, at which time he spoke fluent German (his first tongue) as well as English. His earliest childhood was spent in Austria.

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- 1877 At Yarlet Hall, Stone, Staffordshire, preparatory school before he was ten years old.
- 1879 Private tuition at Mr Green's, rector of Mowsley, Leicestershire.
- 1881 He went to Uppingham (under Thring) for two years. He has told how much he detested it, and how he was able to persuade his mother to let him continue his education
- 1883 at the Karlsruhe Gymnasium in Germany, for six years until the age of twenty. There were excursions "in search of minerals or fossil remains" at this time, he says in *Looking Back*. He wrote scientific papers in German as well as in English at the age of seventeen.
- 1886 His first appearance in print, a short, scientific essay, "Variation of Plumage in the Corvidæ", published in *The Zoologist*. His main interests at this time were scientific, and other papers by him came out on zoological subjects. Already bi-lingual in English-German, he had meanwhile become a fine classical scholar and learned Italian as well. He now began learning Russian, with a view to passing the Civil Service examination.
- 1888 First visit to Capri, in the spring, at the age of twenty—a turning-point in his life, as became clear later on. In July came the end of his "Karlsruhe period".
- 1889 Perfecting his French in Paris for the Diplomatic Service. Trips to Ireland and the Hebrides before 1890.
- 1890 Two years of cramming in London, at Scoones, when he had rooms for a time at 47 Haymarket, and then in Walsingham House (where the Hotel Ritz now stands).
- 1891 Publication of "On the Herpetology of the Grand Duchy of Baden" in nine consecutive numbers of *The Zoologist*. Visit to the Shetland and Orkney Isles, and to the Aeolian (Lipari) Islands.
- 1892 First journey to Greece in the spring, passing through Malta.
- 1893 Civil Service Examination passed in March, a year at the Foreign Office, and Mediterranean journeys—to Italy and

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Greece. His love and feeling for these countries were then established.

- 1894 From March, two and a half years in the British Embassy, St Petersburg (at his own request in the matter of this capital), first as attaché but soon as Third Secretary. A journey to Finland.
- 1895 Published "On the Darwinian Hypothesis of Sexual Selection" ("A long, scientific paper on the colouring of lizards. A well-reasoned essay on the utility of useless characters"—John Davenport). Journeys to Poland, the Mediterranean, Asia Minor: Constantinople, Smyrna, Angora. While on leave in Italy he wrote an official paper for the Foreign Office: "Report on the Pumice Stone Industry of the Lipari Islands". It led to the abolition of child labour there. This was his second visit to Lipari.
- 1896 He applied for, and was granted, two years *en disponibilité* from the foreign Office and did not return at the end of this time to the Diplomatic Service, although asked several times if he would not do so, leaving Russia in November this year.
- 1897 Shortly after, he inherited half of his father's property in Austria and bought the fine Villa Maya, on the Posilipo promontory north of Naples, without having seen it. He was well off at this time. Visits to the Vorarlberg, London, Paris.
- 1898 Married Elsa FitzGibbon, a kinswoman, whose Irish father was Augustus FitzGibbon of Mount Shannon, Co. Limerick. First visit to India, with his wife.
- 1899 His eldest son, Archie, was born in the Villa Maya. First visit to Tunisia.
- 1900 In Ceylon part of this year. His second son, Robin, was born in the Villa Maya. At this time he settled on the Bay of Naples, going next to Capri—a period of five years in all. During the early 1900's he was travelling much in the Mediterranean regions and several times in Egypt.
- 1901 Published *Unprofessional Tales*, which is his first book only in

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- part, since it was written in conjunction with his wife, appearing under the pseudonym of "Normyx": seven short stories, one poem and *Nerinda*. Re-written, some of the stories came out later under his own name in various magazines and, with the poem, in *Experiments* (1925). *Nerinda* was republished in book form in Florence in 1929, by Orioli.
- 1903 Various Monographs, essays on Capri and matters of local interest, later published again as part of the big *Capri—Materials for a Description of the Island*. The essay on Tiberius appeared later in *Siren Land*. He was divorced this year.
- 1904 He built the Villa Daphne on Capri (sold to a German architect just before 1914). Planted many trees on a tract of land on the island, at Caterola, and bought a site of woodland on the Castiglione, the Petrarra, where building started but had to be abandoned from lack of money. To part with it, he says in *Looking Back*, "was a wrench, one of the worst of many".
- 1905 A draft of *Siren Land*.
- 1907 First visit to Calabria. Much of *Old Calabria* written during a spell of acute financial depression. "Meanwhile his Austrian capital had been realised, through no fault of his own, and largely spent . . . When he was 39 years old, his career as an amateur scholar and scientist came to an end. From then on until his death he had to live by his pen" (*Times Literary Supplement*).
- 1908 Journeys to Ischia and the Lipari Islands.
- 1909 Walking through southern Italy. The Messina earthquake had occurred on December 8 the previous year and he distributed relief-money collected by himself from foreigners in Italy. An article on his impressions of Messina appeared in *The Cornhill* and later in *Old Calabria*. Of his article on Edgar Allan Poe, published in *Putnams and the Reader* in January this year, he says in *Looking Back*, "I think this was my first serious venture into literature". Another journey to Tunisia which was productive a little later of *Fountains in the Sand*.

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- 1910 Unwilling return, because of circumstances, to London, where he now lived for five years.
- 1911 Edward Garnett sponsored the publication of *Siren Land*. "Not the first book of a brilliant amateur but one long pondered by a man who had been training himself to think and write clearly for over twenty years" (John Davenport). Douglas tells how nearly two-thirds of the edition had to be pulped. There have been several new ones since. He made another journey this year to Calabria, with "Eric", when both caught malaria.
- 1912 Publication of *Fountains in the Sand* ("written with meticulous care"—*Looking Back*). October 1912 to April 1916, assistant editor of *The English Review*, at first with Ford Madox Ford as editor, who was soon succeeded by Austin Harrison.
- 1913 A journey, with "Eric", to the Sorrentine peninsula.
- 1914 Reviewing, hack-writing and contributing to a war magazine, *Ideas*, edited by Caradoc Evans.
- 1915 Publication of *Old Calabria*.
- 1916 Publication of *London Street Games*. Return to Italy (the time described in *Alone*). On Capri, finishing the writing of *South Wind*.
- 1917 Publication and immediate success of *South Wind*.
- 1918 In Paris for a time, and at St Malo, working there on *They Went*. In Mentone also, where he met René, the "Mr R" of *Together*.
- 1919 A spring journey to Provence with René.
- 1920 He was in Greece again this year for some time. Publication of *They Went*.
- 1921 Publication of *Alone*.
- 1923 Publication of *Together*.

After 1920, Douglas was entirely resident in Italy and, after meeting the Italian bookseller and publisher Orioli in Florence in 1922, he settled in that city, living in an apartment on the Lungarno delle Grazie, where, apart from writing, he began in 1924

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to publish limited, signed editions for subscribers of his own books, the rights of which were disposed of to a commercial firm some time after these editions were sold out. There were many further journeys in the twenties and thirties—to Austria and the Tyrol, France and Monte Carlo, Greece, Tunisia, India. In the spring of 1928 he was in Baalbek, the Lebanon, climbing the Cedar Col, at Beyrut and in Syria. And twice, in 1925 and 1931, he went as far as Tanganyika in East Africa. There were many trips as well to Calabria and other parts of Italy.

He left Florence in 1937 and came to Vence in the South of France, staying there, and at Antibes last of all, until, owing to the war and German occupation, conditions became so bad at the end of 1940 that he decided on taking the long and arduous journey, alone, in ill-health and now aged seventy-two, to Lisbon, with the aim of getting to England. He did not, as has sometimes been erroneously reported, go at any time to the United States of America. He arrived in London in January 1941 and remained there and at other places in England until the summer of 1946, when his long-desired return to Italy became possible. From Naples he went immediately to Capri.

Here, where old friends such as Edwin Cerio and many other Capresi were happy to welcome him, Douglas spent the last years of his life, in excellent and fortunate circumstances. The arrival of Kenneth Macpherson, a very close friend whom he had known since 1931, led to the acquisition of the beautiful Villa Tuoro, where Douglas had his own separate apartment. There has been some confusion concerning the state of his finances during the last years of his life. One American Press account (*Time*) even stated that he died "in penury in a borrowed villa"! The truth is that his income, from two annuities, royalties and other sources, was £1,000 at the time of his death.

February 1952: He had been suffering for a long time from arterio-sclerosis and now became ill with erysipelas. Although every possible care was taken and remedy administered, it was the prelude to the coma which ended in his quiet death on the stroke of midnight between February 8 and 9. For 83 years that strong

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constitution had borne him through an active and strenuous life.

His funeral was that of "a great man", for, in appreciation of the number and scope of his writings on Capri, and because he was much beloved there by all, the Capresi had made him a citizen of honour on his return in 1946. Many indeed were those, said the report in the *Rome Daily American*, to follow his coffin. The funeral oration was pronounced by Edwin Cerio, leading citizen of the island. Some of his words are in Kenneth Macpherson's beautiful personal tribute to Douglas, published in 1953, *Omnes Eodem Cogimur*.

"'Friend Norman, you who loved all created things and created many loved things, perhaps had one single hate: Rhetoric. However, permit that Rhetoric too this once may come to render homage; suffer a slight rhetorical gesture: the offering of a small branch from an Island tree in memory of all the trees you planted to make it green.' The flower-covered coffin was at his side, and as he stepped away, the branch was flung sideways upon it almost brusquely."

He is buried in the Protestant Cemetery among its young and slender cypresses. The headstone of the noble, dark Verde Serpentino marble tomb which Kenneth Macpherson has had made bears but three words beside his name and the dates and places of his birth and death: "Omnes Eodem Cogimur". It faces Vesuvius, with Ischia in its haze to the left and the heights of Sorrento to the right—his "Siren Land".

Books by Norman Douglas

As First Published

UNPROFESSIONAL TALES	1901
SIREN LAND	1911
FOUNTAINS IN THE SAND	1912
OLD CALABRIA	1915
LONDON STREET GAMES	1916
SOUTH WIND	1917
THEY WENT	1920
ALONE	1921
TOGETHER	1923
D. H. LAWRENCE AND MAURICE MAGNUS: A PLEA FOR BETTER MANNERS	1924
EXPERIMENTS	1925
BIRDS AND BEASTS OF THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY	1927
IN THE BEGINNING	1927
SOME LIMERICKS	1928
NERINDA	1929
ONE DAY	1929
HOW ABOUT EUROPE?	1929
PANEROS	1930
CAPRI—MATERIALS FOR A DESCRIPTION OF THE ISLAND	1930
SUMMER ISLANDS	1931
LOOKING BACK	1933
AN ALMANAC	1945
LATE HARVEST	1946
FOOTNOTE ON CAPRI	1952
VENUS IN THE KITCHEN	1953

I

ESSAY ON DOUGLAS

1

Of his Ways and Character

GRAND man, indeed, was Norman Douglas—in our everyday sense of the word—and a great one in his writing. A grand man in life: wise and witty, creative and energetic, with that warm humanism, and, for all his learning, that modesty in spirit which mark the true artist and savant.

Of startling personality, as all who knew him will agree, his independence of mind, always so clearly expressed, has prompted some to the use of the word “iconoclast”. He was also more self-dependent than most—of a type who, alone on a desert island, would contrive somehow to turn that time to profit—although at the thought of such a horrible contingency I can hear him murmur or exclaim, “God forbid!” A law unto himself . . . It is one of the attributes of those born, such as he, under Sagittarius, to whom his allegiance was often voiced. He is, in short, that Archer all of whose arrows hit the mark. It does not seem too much to claim, with the lasting evidence of all his books before us. He was *exact*—of an epoch when “say what you mean and mean what you say” was rightly honoured. How well he did both—yet without pedagogical aridities ever. And yes, he is one of the “immortals”.

He was born December 8, 1868, at Falkenhorst, Thüringen, a village in the Vorarlberg.

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He died in the first hour of February 9, 1952, in the Villa Tuoro, Capri.

When we first met in Florence in February 1923 he was 54 and I, 27.

What shall be said first of a writer? Surely something about his literary personality . . . Thinking of his, I seem to hear a chord in major harmonies out of which at times emerges a trumpet; and that trumpet bears the name "Robust". Dozens of other words surge up to add their touch to a description of his character. No forward adjective is this, if it may conduct a thesaurian number of others that all as fittingly belong. Maybe not a very intellectual adjective at first sight? All the better, for Douglas can never be thought of as a stratospheric highbrow, above the *mêlée* in an ivory tower, because of (what he might himself have called) "ingrowing intellectualism". As detached as you please—more so than most—from some particular strain in his personality, its roots, however, well in the earth of daily life, distilling much individual sweetness from that generous and common source.

Robust in continuous energy, movement and appetite, with his scope and breadth of vision, his zest for all sorts of things that are not only scientific and static but tenuous and floating as well: the mysterious realm of creativeness. Robust as a writer of descriptive, conversational and beautiful prose, admirable at dialogue. One thinks of him sometimes as a Southern sun calling Nature to her multiple tasks of parturition—with a great feeling, too, for the mineral mood that is part of the earth as well.

Robust in other ways: in fending off the enemy, in sailing close to the wind and out-running the storm—as his very life has shown.

To some he may seem decidedly complex, yet I think everything about him is in excellent harmony; and, above all, he is so very lucid, as all of his works testify. Even those scientific monographs of his youthful years, long before he undertook writing as a career, are revealing; a little touch here and a little dash there causing his individuality to emerge from the mechanism of

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specialised subjects. Yes, complex. For there are two "faces", two main ones: the lusty, spontaneous, jovial, assertive one, with its wonderful gifts of inventiveness, laughter and irony *in excelsis*: and that other, the unexpected dreaminess, a mist over the fen at evening.

There are also his appreciation of silence, his understanding of solitude and his contemplative hours: nature in metaphysical as opposed to lyrical, rhapsodical or dramatic mood. The flow of his current is uninterrupted. Now gushing bright, now tranquil-flowing, it runs through a whole panoramic variety, yet all seems to harmonise following some private and personal rule: his taste. And not only is there an admirable integrity in everything, but his ego—both as man and as author—is astonishingly complete, remarkably *integrate*.

The result is a very fine artist.

"His nature, character and ways"—one says, and is immediately aware of not being able to see the wood for the trees. How to overcome such trepidation? By plunging into the forest . . .

Fifty-four years old when I met him, he looked, I think, slightly younger; very erect in bearing but without stiffness, tallish, strong-set, broad-shouldered and well-built, with something of what he used to call "a slight em-bom-point". His walk was straight and his bearing manly. How pleasing the shape of his head, with a touch of austerity about it, the sheerness of its contour sometimes suggestive of that of a statue set against space. In later times, the back of his head evoked the sleek curve of a pigeon's, one of the darling lines in nature. He had greyish-white hair, thick and very close-cut, with some light amber in it, the front lock most individual and sometimes rebellious, the rim at the back under the felt hat almost ink-blue—all of this blending charmingly. And in the last years of all, in the sunshine of Capri, there seemed a sort of snow-sparkle about him. Of florid complexion, definite in feature, a long, straight nose with a particular sharp tip, and a prominent chin. Very good facial bones. His eyes

Essay on Douglas

were rather deep set under thick eyebrows—blue, grey-blue, green-grey-blue, as all eyes that are like water or the sea should be. Sometimes piercing, indeed, was their look; sometimes non-committal. His lips lay in a firm, fine line, rather thin and invariably very red. His hands were hands in repose, somewhat full in flesh with excellently-proportioned long fingers and shapely tips and nails, more expressive in form than in movement. He did not use his hands in talking, was not a man of gesturing speech. A pipe was with him at all hours, a cigar twice a day; he did not disdain cigarettes, while as for snuff . . . !

The way of his talk has already been well described by several, and his voice was most individual. Many were the inflections in it and many the differences in speed—from the “staccato note” to a slow, absent-minded drawl—a sort of musing sound. The meanings conveyed in his use of three simple words, “He’s all right”, were several. Spoken with an exclamation mark (as it would be in writing), a sign of pleasure; three dots after it (to continue the simile) meant that he was pretty dubious about the extent of the “all-rightness”. Disgust came out in a forceful “Pah!”, while “Ha!” was a rap of sarcasm, of irony, or an emphasis set into a phrase, a startling, bright bead in the sun.

I can well imagine him as intimidating to some at first meeting. That would depend on the circumstances, the mood he was in and their own character. As I got to know him better, it seemed to me that I could sense him assessing a newcomer. He would often be quite silent with such, listening to the talk going on. Was he rapid in making up his mind about people? Very, I think—at least as to essentials. When in no doubt as to their unpleasantness, an exclamation to this effect shot out in one sharp spit of a word, and the tempo of “He’s all right” was an exact indication; it came like the crack of a whip when the person had his esteem, with a great emphasis on the “he”.

How much his Foreign Office training and years in the Diplomatic Service contributed to his instinctive form of tact, I cannot tell. It was a beautiful kind of tact. Prudence too he had in great measure, and his general bearing with strangers or indifferent

Of his Ways and Character

people was very agreeable to watch. Although one of his highly sympathetic traits, *never to be bothered by bores*, was very marked indeed, he hated to hurt feelings, and I have heard him fuss and over-fuss, hoping that so and so "had not noticed". He could fold up (and also put down a drink very quickly and neatly in prevision of some hour that might need a good deal of patience) and steal away and not be found—a most necessary accomplishment in Italy, for instance, where so many people were perennially, "hoping to meet Norman Douglas while we're in Florence or on C'pree".

It is difficult to try to describe his nature and attributes, and the best I can do is to set down all the following words that have come as if singly—a few last month and more today, as it were—and hope that they will construct the truthful image. Every one applies to him; there could be even more! *Mais il ne faut pas noyer le poisson*; one must not drown the fish in its own element.

He was: very energetic, sanguine, virile, decisive—incisive too; observant, downright, forthright, now and again sudden, with little moments of brusqueness—terse, blunt, brief and dismissive; this was generally followed by some humorous remark—as like as not against himself. How caustic at times he was, how "astringent" . . . (a great word of his). Gentle and mellow as well, now and again even a little wistful. Generous, free-spirited and magnificently independent in life, in mind and in style, a great despiser of "the herd", of every form of standardisation and bureaucracy. Blessed be he for having had his fling at them in *How about Europe?* (one of his best books) and not there alone! Perceptive and exact, with never a trace of vagueness or looseness in thought or expression. Very accustomed to working things out, quick at his findings—but also meditative. His silences were, I imagine, sometimes screens of defence—and he was *the best listener* I have ever known. Good manners, beautiful breeding and reserve, with an unostentatious natural dignity, an example of one definition of "a gentleman": "Never be rude unless you mean to be." His charm was immense and sunny, and his *wit* certainly the best it has ever been my joy to listen to.

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Bluff and hearty on occasion, exuberant and spontaneous—time and again have I thought of his tirades and sallies as a sort of sparkling fugue. Straightforward and forging-ahead in nature, what of his more purely intellectual qualities?

These were: *creativity*, a great analytical capacity, and a profound sense of constructive criticism. He had a great power of concentration, a magnificent memory and gift of retention, and the kind of ego-centrism that made the best use of all these assets, as is clear in all of his writings. He was extremely well educated in the classics and, beyond that remarkably self-taught. A scholar with the mind and “feel” of a scientist, and with that innate modesty and *pudeur*, that “humility” (his own word) of the true artist who is a respecter of science, of nature and of things well done. As a humanist, he was an emphatic admirer of individuality everywhere, in no matter what field, class, age, sex or nationality.

All self-indulged-in *mea culpas* and bearings of self-imposed crosses were extremely distasteful to him. And indeed, that exclamation “Everything is interesting!” may well represent not only his fine vitality but also his great *versatility*, that many-sidedness of his which is manifest in the very diversity of his many books—a thing which has often been emphasised with delight in criticisms of his work. “Everything is interesting!” What an illustration it is of his own zest and appetite, this phrase from one of his books reprinted in his *Almanac* among the 365 thoughts allotted there to the days of the year.

A wonderful walker, his physical capacity for all sorts of arduous journeys in strenuous circumstances was remarkable; but (as “connoisseur”, *not*, pray, as “hedonist”) he also knew a great deal about quality and comfort, insisting on them whenever procurable. His reading was extensive, his taste lying rather in scientific fact and thought and as yet untilled fields of knowledge, and in the *observation* perhaps even more than in the psychological study of human beings and their behaviour.

Scientist (natural science and geology), scholar in Greek and

Of his Ways and Character

Latin and several other strata of Letters (including some medieval Italian subjects), he was a very fine linguist indeed. His modern languages were German, Italian, French and Russian—in that order—and his life began with German and English bilingually. When I persisted in asking which of these he thought he knew a little less well than the others, he said that Russian was “a long while ago and might take some getting back”.*

Did he not tell me that his Italian and German were somewhat better than his French? For all that, many a time have I listened to him express himself in the language of the 4e République; never a mistake came into it, not the tiniest error, and his accent was perfect.

What else is there to add? His knowledge of music, for one. His vocabulary was enormous and of a freshness! His choice and use of words, most individual. Dexterous and adroit, persevering and patient with work. (How that brisk *or* meditative “Stick to it” rings in my head!) And what is “the Douglas touch”? Can I define it this way, perhaps: Some little fancy that would have occurred to no one else on earth—out it comes with a twist to it like the cut on a tennis-ball . . . And there are also the wonders of his *allegro con brio*, his admirable *maestria* in the handling of subjects, spoken or written.

How good are the titles of his books:

South Wind

How about Europe?

They Went

Siren Land and Old Calabria

Alone, Together

Summer Islands

Looking Back

Late Harvest

* Baroness Budberg, who is Russian, said that she and Douglas took a walk together in London during the last war and that his speech was excellent: “He had to look for his words a little, he was speaking rather slowly; but all of it was good, correct Russian”—no mean achievement for a man who had not spoken it for perhaps half a century.

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And now the posthumously-published *Venus in the Kitchen*!

One loves him in his brisk, salubrious mood, in his witty flights, in his calm, reflective vein, such as in *Paneros*, *One Day*, *Birds and Beasts of the Greek Anthology*, where his affinity with ancient Greece is manifest in these words: "The poets of the Anthology, a dozen of whom represent the flowering of the finest civilisation ever known on earth."

Douglas was definitely one of the most *masculine* beings ever met with. It seems good to get this clear—adding that his kind of masculinity had nothing aggressive; it was anything but ostentatious, as characteristic of him, merely, as is the particular nature, say, of this or that tree.

No aura hovered around him suggestive of literary craft—he might have been all sorts of other things as well as a writer—the atmosphere of pristine freshness about him was of the open mountains. How did he work? Methodical, private business! Did he ever talk to me about any book he was engaged on? Only once, I think, the day I typed a few pages for him. In fact, the sum of literary conversations between us might not incorrectly be set at "zero".

One cannot imagine him confronted with fulsome praise, or getting involved in the plots of others, or being asked to discourse on his work, ever. As a critic, he was often slashing—invariably so when the "stuff" appeared to him pretentious, uncertain of itself, or "derivative". And he must be set at the far end of the literary scale from, say, the Bloomsburies. Not that great esteem and respect between him and some of them was lacking; certainly not in the case of Leonard and Virginia Woolf, of Lytton Strachey and David Garnett (whose father, Edward Garnett, had been a good friend and had helped in getting his first book, *Siren Land*, published in 1911). Douglas was in contact with all the authors and personalities one would expect during his years as assistant editor of *The English Review* in 1912–1916, work (as he has said himself) which became even less congenial with Austin Harrison

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as editor after the departure of Ford Madox Ford (then Ford Madox Hueffer). The names of some well-known writers, a few characteristic words about them, are in his *Looking Back*: those two admirable figures, Doughty and W. H. Hudson, and Conrad, Frank Harris, James Elroy Flecker, Rupert Brooke. From Henry James he had a strong and consistent aversion—on account of his style and personality. F. Marion Crawford, the successful American novelist, was known to him at Sorrento. Arthur Rubinstein, the great pianist, and Muriel Draper, that dynamic and interesting woman, were musical-literary friends. At different times he must have found himself with any number and diversity of the intellectuals of England around the literary quaffing-cup. But not at literary banquets, no. Such—at least during the time I knew him—he eschewed with a thundering, brisk “Not on your life!”

Touching on his admiration for certain authors, two immediately come to mind, and they are Doughty—for his rugged prose in *Arabia Deserta*, so well fitted to the subject—and . . . Ouida! For Ouida, whom he never actually met but was in correspondence with and materially befriended, he had a very real admiration, and those pages on her in *Alone* are among his best—an exposition of her merit as a writer, an attack on her detractors (here radiates some of that analytical-critical force of his). The Compton Mackenzies were very old friends indeed and on one occasion the excellent author of *Sinister Street* and *Vestal Fire* was thus affectionately described to me:

“He’s *all right*, my dear. Of course—he’s got all that ridiculous Scottish Nationalism on his mind now, you know!”

D. H. Lawrence? Pah! Although Lawrence—properly taken to bits by him—“was very good indeed at descriptions of scenery and places”. There was esteem in Douglas for Professor Dawkins (Richard MacGillivray), author of that admirable little book on Douglas’s writing; for Dr Oscar Levy, the accredited translator of Nietzsche; for Mr Edward Hutton, author of many books on Italy and Greece, and once with Douglas on a journey in Attica; for Mr John Mavrogordato, himself a Greek of great literary

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culture; for Charles Prentice, his publisher; Reggie Turner, teased and twitted by him as he was throughout all those Italian years, was often mentioned with a sort of appreciative snort when Douglas and Orioli would be ringing the chimes together in Florence about this whimsical connoisseur. There was affection for Bryher, an old and close friend, and for Harold Acton, whom he had known as well and saw all the time in Florence. Admiration for Augustus John (and very agreeable it was to see them together). Mrs Cecil Chesterton was spoken of to me with affection, and Dr Stella Churchill, the psychiatrist. Among others whom he appreciated were D. M. Low, the author of a *Life of Edward Gibbon* and editor of Gibbon's *Journal*; Ian Greenlees (later of the British Council in Rome); Ronald Firbank, when the latter was living in Italy; and there were some "pleasant drinks" with Michael Arlen at one time in Florence. Of Scott Moncrieff, just before Moncrieff's death in Rome, he spoke with concern. In London during the last war it was often "When are we going to see Charles Duff?", for years before, in his *How about Europe?* he had stated his admiration for Duff's *Handbook on Hanging*. Apart from so many other friends of whom I know naught, in the last twenty years and even longer, were Kenneth Macpherson, Roger Senhouse (his publisher), Basil Leng, Viva and William King, John Davenport, Desmond Ryan, James Stern, Neil Hogg, and Raymond Mortimer. To the last-named (how delightful it is to think of now) he gave in Florence, at some time in the twenties, a written certificate to the effect that he was *a good writer . . .*

To me he often said that the man he had liked "*perhaps best in all my life was a Spaniard, Count Campo Alegre, met in St Petersburg*".

The crony, from 1922 until 1941, when he died in Lisbon, was "Pino", Giuseppe Orioli, the Italian publisher and book-connoisseur of Florence.

Not often did Douglas talk to me about any part of his life, yet any descriptive snatch vouchsafed was certainly vivid enough! There was that sort of "saga", so rich in detail, about his trying times in Paris in 1918 which ended with his journey to Mentone

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and the chance meeting at the station there with "René". Nearly all of this can be found in his *Looking Back*, and René must have been an enchanting companion during his long tutoring of him, judging by the lively, happy tone of *Together* (1923), which is all about the journey made by them to the Tyrol. After René's death from tuberculosis in Vence in 1932, there seemed to be a sort of link between this place and Douglas—René's grave.

The word "tutoring" leads to the thought of his feeling for knowledge and for imparting it to the kind of companions he found most congenial. A mine of knowledge himself, and a fount of enjoyment—how well the two are manifest together, as if illustrating that excellent saying of his: "Knowledge is not only power, it is good fun as well."

He was most methodical and recommended—to some, at least—to "keep a diary, no matter how brief, if only of dates and places; you may find it useful later". How many of his own little booklets are still extant? Often I have seen him note the date of letters written, received or answered. And what have I had before my eyes for weeks, going through his letters and notes to me? As if remindingly, on that first one from Lisbon in 1941 that lay, chronologically, on top: "Don't delay", written in large blue pencil in the margin. A keynote to his personality: energy, expeditiousness, sense of grasping the moment.

There were occasions when he seemed to worry more than would appear logical in conjunction with such good spirits and sound foundations. Many a time did he exclaim: "People born under Sagittarius should *always* follow their own instinct! I wish I'd followed mine. I should have been all right now!" Depth under depth of reserve was in him, and if the Scots—of whom I think he was representative in many ways—are supposed to be, on the whole, rather even in "rhythm", without too wide a swing between the sad and gay, I should have thought that Douglas had a good deal of the Irish character as well—a tendency to lavishness in extremes. He seemed to me extremely well-balanced withal! And hardly once, when we were together in London during the aridity, austerity, and worse, of the last war did that

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buoyancy of his fail. As is natural, it needed a not too grimly inclement atmosphere. Difficult to find, then, in a general way! With the temperature physically, morally and conversationally more up than on entering this or that pub, or into the amicable glow of a friend's house, it was rare indeed not to hear some topical quips from him or one of his tirades—before we crept out once more into the black-out to grope our way home, clinging to each other, hard.

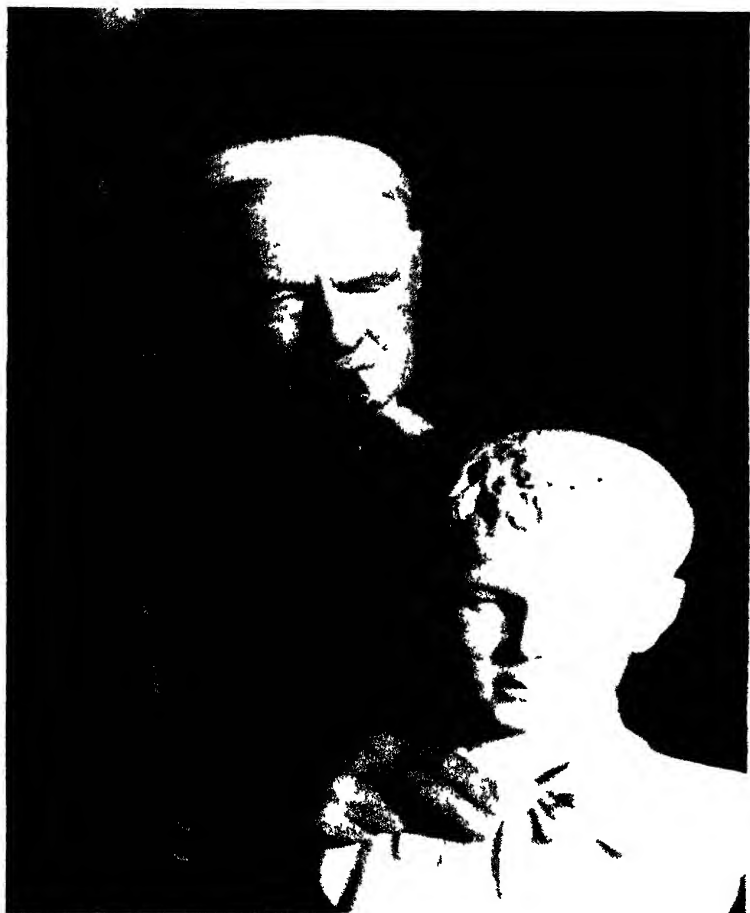
There was a sort of schoolboy flavour about him on occasion. And he would also make use of this or that scientific word, the effect of which in some ordinary phrase could be convulsive. "Hilarious" is an adjective that has not yet come into my list of words that fit him. Hilarious were *we*, the listeners. Norman had a *pince sans rire* quality at times. He was utterly unexpected and unpredictable. And the way his mind worked . . .

No one better than he, for instance, knew the inner difficulties that can confront a writer—the "bad" days, the infuriating impossibility of writing *anything at all* at such and such a moment. "If you can't, you *can't*," was a frequent observation of his. "It's like ****ting: 'go on, go on and do it!' says somebody. But if you can't—ha!—*you can't*. *Pazienza!* It will come!"

Could there be a better comparison?

At times ordinary little commonplaces—positively schoolboyish in their simplicity—would issue in such a way as to sound quite profound: some jocular observation, some apt rejoinder. How curious that in his mouth they should appear so original, brand-new! The circumstances that evoked these "touches" gave them that particular quality. Here, for instance, is a truism (perhaps not so commonplace, after all) with the terseness of an oracle: "If you don't eat well, you can't **** well." A truism all right. But probably no one else has ever put this sound, self-evident piece of anatomical, labyrinthine ABC into such a succinct form.

And that chummy use of anatomical words . . . What about "the second peristaltic movement"? It soothed away a very angry moment of mine while in Tunisia with him. The great tonic



For Darling Nancy
with ten thousand good
wishes from

Norman (aged 10
and 83)

Copied
7 Dec 1954

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that laughter can be! As for oaths . . . Picturesque, evidently, were those with which (as he tells in *Alone*) he revived an Italian commercial traveller, fainting with the heat up a long hill under his gigantic load of hats, with a copious selection of Florentine expletives.

His mimicry, too, was excellent. Suppose "Coop Tie" has just taken place in London and away they all go again seeing each other off at Kings Cross. What else does the air ring with but "Ta-ta, Chorley . . . See ye Friday, Chawlie . . . Don't forget te write, Chaarlie . . ." One of Norman's little pieces, that. "*Chorley*" came to a good many stations with us throughout the years when we were seeing each other off. "*Chorley*" was that whiff of sudden yet salutary ammonia with which Norman waved you or himself away.

He was most unsentimental; a model of such. I had grown so accustomed to being with him at one time for as long as three or four weeks, seeing him practically every day, that I may even have looked slightly like crying, there in front of the Café de Flore in Paris, while saying good-bye: "Oh Norman, Norman—who knows *when* we shall meet again . . . Your voice is so much in my head; I keep on hearing it all the time . . ."

"Really, my dear? That's a queer place for it to be. It *ought* to be in my throat . . ."

Fun, light slap-stick . . . the St. Vitus's hand agitated by a mimicry of gigantic shakes frantically pouring out of a tumbler of wine (and not a drop spilled) . . . This, on the whole, must have shocked one or two people who *may* have taken it for true, as one came in and "the old gentleman who had been sitting so quietly all by himself until now" suddenly seemed to have lost all control of his right hand in his eagerness to welcome his friend with a glass of wine!

He *was* rather amused at shocking people on occasion—although maybe this has been over-emphasised. He shocked even me once, now I come to think of it. But that was on account of the brusqueness with which he exclaimed in reply to a proffered drink, or to some "*Do let me pay the bill this time*":

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"I hate things grudgingly given!"

As one's eyebrows rose in surprise at the sudden gust that tears off one's hat on a calm day, there was Norman continuing:

"All or nothing! Go on, go on, keep me entirely . . ."

Often have I wondered if that extraordinary blank look on his face when confronted by some sudden difficulty or change of plan were really quite natural, or lengthily acquired. Most effective it was. The other person then had to flounder or go on explaining!

And that suddenness of his at times:

"There you are, Nancy! What d'you want better than that?"

"That" is a rather stiff, impersonal Negro in uniform who goes by as two of us are walking with Norman in Holborn. What a start he gave us, right in the middle of a serious conversation too. The Noble Savage with spear and plumes could not have made me jump more. And as for that small word "If", generator and controller of so much in life, in what garb has Norman clad the disturbing little wretch for me? In a nice cockney one:

"If, my dear? IF my grandmother were a motor-bus she'd 'ave wheels."

Cheerfully and briskly would he dismiss some matter perplexing enough to others with the good old "It'll be all the same in a hundred years!" This sort of little chopper-stroke was absolutely final; no arguing with Norman! But his kindness, when he had undertaken to do something, was sterling, and he was extremely annoyed on the occasion that brought forth the following explosion:

"To Hell with it! I can't go on running after him as if he were a ballet-girl!"

That was said of a distinguished London editor who persisted in not replying on the score of some poems that Norman had promised their author to submit for publication—an occasion, this, when he forgot to add what sometimes came to him after everything had been tried in vain: "I think I shall *pray* now. Do you think that would do any good?"

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And again, that suddenness of his. It was most bewildering during the war-years in London. He had the most terrible, formidable, great, resounding *sneeze*—quite independently of snuff. The shock of it! One's back was turned and one could not think what was happening to *the room*. This, surely, was not any of the sounds of war? A few seconds would pass before one realised it was just Norman sneezing—after a lengthy preparation. (Others will corroborate.)

His enjoyment and knowledge of so many different things—can it be this that has brought him the reputation of being “a hedonist”? It seems to me, rather, that certain statements, or remarks, have been picked out of his books, and emphasised or given a twist, resulting in this erroneous, misleading assessment. The same with the word “aesthete”—often applied to him. It is perfectly all right in the purist or true sense. But how many are those who think of *that* sense first of all? “Aesthete” is a trifle too close to “*précieux*”. “The doctrine that pleasure is the chief good” is one dictionary definition of “hedonist”. High times in Pompeii before the lava . . . Six dozen oysters and a magnum of champagne and away we all go to a game of *chemmy* on the Riviera—hedonism to some. In Douglas, *connoisseur*, *aesthete*, *hedonist* and *man of wit* were all components of a very much more consequent whole. The words that apply best are “connoisseur” and “man of wit”.

This point has been debated a number of times and I think I am in danger of falling into “the error of the Scots”. That is, his view of them:

“What's the matter with the Scots? Labouring the point, stressing the obvious and underlining the self-evident!”

The English, by comparison, sound more varied, though also pretty odd:

“What's the matter with the English? Cricket, Handel's Oratorio and . . .” I am not positive, although nearly so, that the third blemish was “Beer”.

It would have been delightful to hear him on all the nations in

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this manner (France and the United States of America might have been lively ones) but the only other definition I remember was that of the Italians:

And what was the matter with *them*? Nothing whatever—unless one were an admirer of armed violence. For:

“The Italians make rotten soldiers. They suddenly start thinking about their mothers right in the middle of an attack!”

His little bits of “Table-talk” (would one call it that?) were delicious and oddly sudden too.

Debunking a popular fallacy: “Ever undressed a gipsy?” he asked the American journalist Morris Gilbert. “I have, often. *Perfectly* clean!”

Medical advice—to get rid of the unwanted: “Sit in a bath of hot ashes—wood ashes—for several hours, and it *may* work.” (It sounds like an old peasant remedy and he was as careful to point out that he could not vouch for its success.)

Travel—or rather ‘rushing about’: If one moved from one place to another for no matter what reason, including the most uncontrollable ones, one ran the risk of becoming “positively neurotic”. (It never occurred to him that he did his own full share of it!) Besides, what is travel nowadays? Not as in the past! They used to do it then in the grand manner . . . Oh, not so long ago, some time before 1914: “There was that old Mrs . . . , about 80 years old—*perfectly indestructible*—She had the stomach-pump every morning, drove all over Europe like mad, and gave the car to her chauffeur as a tip when she went away.”

That zest of his! It came not only from his optimistic nature but from sound, strong, exuberant health. And words in his *Siren Land*—on longevity—apply well to him:

“That tough, cheerful egotism, which, sanely regarded, is but sanity itself.”

If the word “egotism” appear misleading or equivocal, maybe children, whose minds are more spontaneous than those of many adults, can put this in its right perspective. The instinctiveness of

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childhood would hardly be attracted to egotism in the sense of "selfishness" or "over-self-centredness".

"He could have competed with the Pied Piper of Hamelin," says Harold Acton in his *Memoirs of an Aesthete*. "Reggie Turner used to say that he should have been a schoolmaster. Such a schoolmaster would have been my ideal, and I regret that I met him too late, when I was more or less crystalised. All the same, he was my great professor of energy and archbishop of common sense."

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DOUGLAS and Italy—more than half of his life was spent in this country which he knew remarkably well, particularly Calabria and Apulia, the mainland around Naples (“Siren Land”), and Tuscany—not to leave out the Latium, the Sabine Hills and the central parts around Rome. Such were his most travelled regions. In regard to his life and work, Italy and Douglas are inseparable.

That “he spoke Italian like a native” has often been rightly said, although “like several” is more exact, for, besides talking it in its pure form to perfection, he possessed more than one dialect and could also tell where most Italians came from as soon as they began to speak—that good was his proficiency and also his ear. Language and grammar he dominated entirely; his voice and intonation (to my mind) were un-Italian; his accent, however, admirable. At times, just for good measure, a bit of “Italian as she is spoke” by some of the foreign residents would come in! It was a joy then to see the increased admiration or astonishment of, say, the waiters, and people in general were amazed at his command of the language. Moreover, he was certainly up to every trick of the fascinating, and tricky, country!

Sharp or genial according to mood and circumstances, Douglas never seemed to be out of his stride for an instant. And extremely attractive he was too when in a temper! Fascinating then were the

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dynamics projected, the speed with which it all went off. And then suddenly, *boomst!*—all over, subsiding into the charming national conclusion “*Pazienza!*” rapped out with a shake of the head. Haven’t we seen him thus in those “restaurant rages” we all suffered from together in Italy in the early twenties?

Pernickety over his food? Nothing of the kind, but knowledgeable and determined. A healthy zest in eating, tastes at times epicurean, a memory of just where the *scampi* were best. That complex world of earth, sea and air which comes into the kitchens in natural form and issues thence to the tables of *cantine* and *trattorie* and *fiaschetterie* and *bottiglierie* and other *ristoranti*, often in extraordinary garb and invariably preluded on the *lista* by fantasies such as *Pastina in Brodo*, *Ossobuco*, *Pavese e Uovo*, *Stracciatella*, *Bragniola di Maiale* . . . whether it were the straightforward *Suino* or things that, in such menu-writing, bore a resemblance to “*Animulæ*” . . . Douglas was past-master in recommending or explaining any of these mysteries. And what’s more, some of them should be made, for him, in just such a way . . . There would be a little stir when he came into the *ristorante*: *O! Il signor Douglas* . . . smiles on the faces of *padrone* and servers, his little snuffbox would be proffered all round as the complicated order was discussed. Ah—here are Enzo and Galleazzo just in from school! A conversation arises, he questioning and they telling him all sorts of things which make him nod his head in appreciation, saying what he has often written: “Learn from children”. A strong *toscano* cigar walking briskly back home or turning off for his letters at Cooks—such is a typical midday moment in Florence in the twenties and thirties.

I imagine that he wrote Italian “like a native” too, like a *littérateur*. His eight books on Italy and with an Italian background contain few if any references to its Letters, to its arts and authors—I mean, to those in recent times, for the allusions to classical ages are frequent. Snakes, birds, lizards, sirens, children, mountains, ancients and antiquity, anecdotes, incidents, comparisons, wine, hamlets, peasants, food, conversations by the hundred, thoughts that begin around a Latin stone and end somewhere

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quite else than you might expect after spiralling with the grace of a leaf floating down the wind—of such are his books. And there is, indeed, a great deal of historical information in them here and there, of little pieces of scientific knowledge, beautifully worked in.

He knew the “innards” of this country very well—the likely line of intrigue without which Italians cannot live, and just the kind of generosity that is to be expected and found—the interiors of those dark old taverns and wineshops (a most important side of national life) with their madly picturesque old men, and young as well. The interior, too, of the minds and characters of a good many children and of all their families tagging on behind them! He was a Nature-man, supremely so in Italy. Not only here, of course, for he was physically and psychologically as happy in his native Vorarlberg (the land of his *Together*) with the inhabitants of those utterly different regions. Not only a Nature-man, but a regular dab at distilling wit, information and wisdom from the words of such unexpected characters as one meets in Italy at every turn. In this respect and in such hours along the roads and in the *taverne* he had the fluency of a buoyant commercial traveller—everybody likes the astute, friendly, laughter-evoking man wherever he turns up! Great knowledge was his, too, of *leisure*, the rest to body and mind alike after the arduous day on the mountain-paths or in the Florentine print-shop. In praise of leisure! How often he stresses its delectable benefits.

Italians are quick at assessing and keep their own council till they have made up their minds; they appear to be thinking you out. Rich must have been many a conclusion as he came and went and sat and talked and drank with them for over forty years.

He had been living in Florence already for two or three years before the beginning of Fascism and, after its hideous developments, one might surmise that he would have pronounced upon it, now and again, with trustworthy people, as knowledgeable of

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its psychology as he was. But no. He seemed to have made up his mind that he was not going to say anything at all! Such was the way with all of us who tried to draw him out, and there are but two instances I can think of—one with me, one with Harold Acton, when he allowed himself a word on the subject—that is, until 1937, when the odious atmosphere in Italy contributed rather weightily to his leaving Florence.

To me in 1928 he had an explosion about the “*Dopo Lavoro*”, or “After Work” organisation, official and obligatory, which inculcated young workers with ideas of just how they should occupy their leisure:

“A preposterous invention! First, they are taught all the wrong things. And then, hours that are supposed to be for leisure, when work is over for the day, are all controlled! *State-control*. What rubbish! Workers are told what they should and should not do, and what to think; their occupations are supervised. Why can’t a boy, or anyone else, do just what he wants with his own time? Pah! It’s all part of the beastly system. You should hear what Emilio has to say about it!” Knowing Emilio—at that time a young printer of sixteen or so, a devoted protégé-friend who as a child had helped in his flat for several years—I could visualise the gentle yet angry and vivid way Emilio would be describing it, and Douglas’s minute questioning, with anything but gently-expressed indignation!

To Harold Acton, as noted by him in his *Memoirs of an Aesthete*, Douglas said: “Even the children were being standardised. At school they were taught to be Fascists first, to salute Mussolini’s portrait and honour war. They were supplied with axes to grind and prejudices to air. History ceased with the Roman Empire and began again with the first Fascist year. And since Fascists got preference when applying for jobs, they were no longer encouraged to be true to themselves.”

If one lets one’s thoughts run on from this point, one might ask oneself where Douglas would have been in some revolutionary

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outburst: looking down with interest from the balcony or closing the window—pah! Maybe either. But certainly not looking down in that sour manner, misrepresenting the whole thing a few minutes later, as Lawrence does in *Aaron's Rod*. The "live and let live" attitude was very strong in Douglas; and there was a good deal, too, of "What's the use? It'll all be the same in 100 years—so to Hell with it!" A strange mixture of "social sense" and dislike of such. What, to him, were social matters—(*les grandes questions sociales*, as it is said, so much better, in French)? "Politics" "Meddling", "Isms" and "Causes". The humanist he is encloses a great paradox on this score. So discerning about people individually, a scalpel at ripping up the fool or the hypocrite—and with the hell of a conscience too—All sorts of *grandes questions sociales* come into his incandescent *How about Europe?* which was written as a reply, in some sort, to Kathleen Mayo's *Mother India*. It is full of blasts at preposterous "over-legislation" in England, of attacks on child-reformatories in France, of scorn of bigotry, of ironic and provocative comparisons between abuses in Europe and others in India, and how much else of the sort. What else, indeed, is this, but a compilation of "social subjects"? What else? One of his best books!

Votes for Woman—a needed measure or an "ism"?

Divorce-law Reforms—which he warmly upholds.

How peculiar that the difference between fussy cranks and all sorts of imperative questions in public life seemed sometimes imperceptible to him. A fine paradox here!

"Centrifugal"—the word that he applies to that excellent Scottish traveller in Italy at the beginning of last century, Craufurd Tait Ramage—is a word that certainly fits him better than "egotistical". And he could never be said to object to others fighting so as to better their lot! Yet at times the vigour of his strictures against "all this craze for world-improvement" make him sound, passingly, like an Old Conservative! But then one must immediately add that his attitude was even more that of the British Liberal! For instance: "Why give people too much education when they won't know how to use it?" But also something

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that might be expressed like this: "Yes, Africans are 'natives'. Indians too. Well, what are you going to do about it? As for those one might call 'bush-natives', the pure, unadulterated African—Ha! That's the real article—Better than a good many whites."

Naturally he was without race-prejudice, although one knot in the *fabulæ* gathered about him like a haze at one time, was that he did not care for Jews . . . This is ridiculous, and at least two very good friends of his, Dr Oscar Levy and the American poet Walter Lowenfels, were Israelites. There must have been many others; these come immediately to mind simply because I met them myself with Douglas. This "prejudice", however, got into print in the United States of America and here (in *D. H. Lawrence and Maurice Magnus*) one finds his answer. Incidentally, Magnus, whom Douglas defends so trenchantly, was partly Jewish too:

"I received not long ago a copy of a well-known Jewish monthly from America wherein, to my surprise, I discovered an 'Imaginary Conversation' between myself and the author, a young Jewish friend of mine, on the subject of "Judaism and Paganism"; he supporting the Jewish point of view and I the other. Now it strikes me that when a man has written 'Far be it from me to disparage the tribe of Israel. I have gained the conviction—firm fixed now as the Polar Star—that the Hebrew is as good a man as the Christian'—it strikes me that such a man can hardly be put forward as a representative Jew-baiter."

Everyone must have his chance in life (he aided more than a fair few himself), but everything that smacks of "causes" and that ends in "ism"—to Hell with it! The flash finishes with a brisk and businesslike "Ha!" or with a philosophical smile and a shake of the head: "You won't change human nature, my dear; just try, just try . . ."

His view about Socialism was something like this: merely a standardisation, a regimentation of personality, rendering all individual expression out of the question!

Let me get back to Italy with Douglas . . .

Essay on Douglas

Among all those handsome, expressive or scheming faces, those rapid gestures and rambunctious gusts of sudden argument, laughter or anger in the excitable *Mezzogiorno*—the South—Douglas, with his quiet manner and sober clothing, must have appeared rather like some northern doctor—a close-shaven, precise man of science, some senior ace in engineering maybe? He enters the village café and sits down ordering a *mezzo bianco* in a quick low voice. The white wine comes and he tries it. And then, after a pause, comes the surprise to all—those first words spoken by him, as like as not, in local fashion. Is he alone or with that essence of Italy, Pino Orioli? If they are not sitting together with everyone soon gathered round them (all too soon, rendering impossible that pressing discussion about publishing that was to be held in comfortable *leisure*, if such a thing can be found hereabouts!) then Douglas and the *padrone* of the establishment, or it may be the village priest, become the quick cronies of the day. Thus North and South come together, head-on, and the result is magnificent.

His “North” is very marked; it is never Teutonic. Any more than his taverning was ever bohemian. There is no *cabotinage*, ever, in Douglas. A law unto himself and rock-true, he is a solitary, and he is detached, and he is also highly gregarious when he wants to be; and in such felicitous equilibrium that he is at home and at ease with all sorts of people in all kinds of circumstances, *except* in the drawing-rooms and at the lunch-parties of the smart or the intellectual “set”, which he eschews most sedulously, despite the repeated invitations.

Now here is something telling, in *Old Calabria*, on how he set about getting to know a place. It would be some small back o’ beyond town or village and he would go to the barber’s (that centre of life) and to the apothecary’s (which, it seems, is another) and just sit and listen and *not* ask questions. For if one did such a thing, every one’s mind would be filled with mistrust and even hostility. Whereas, if one sat politely, dropping a remark now and then into the general conversation, pretty soon these people would become interested in you, without afterthought; they

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would take you for a well-disposed person and you were soon accepted as a friend.

For those who knew his ways and his wit it is not difficult to see how well this must have worked; his curiosity, his interest were always so engagingly conveyed!

One may evoke him in another Italian setting too, for of course he was not *all* the time on the mountain-paths, and that is sitting with a good large whisky and soda before dinner in his beautiful Villa Maya on the Posilipo near Naples, or, in the same way, on Capri, in the Villa Daphne, built by him at the beginning of this century, often busy then with the planting of trees. (Capriotes bless him for his foresight; the island has much benefited from such scientific prudence.) And what has he been doing, the day? He has steeped himself in the study of antiquities, or has been excavating in one of the sites, or for hours and hours in the Naples Library, looking up data, collating curious pieces of local history from Roman or Medieval times. All of this goes into several Monographs on Capri, and they—many years later—are in turn poured into that vast *magnum opus*, CAPRI—*Materials for a Description of the Island* (1930).

Long, long before I knew him were these antiquarian days of Edwardian epoch when he was very well-off and spent his time, when not in one of these houses, in travel—to Ischia, the Lipari Islands, Elba, all along both coasts and into the interior. As then, later on he was travelling about often on foot—a veritable expert in short cuts, remembering this or that angle of mountain that *ought* to lead to . . . ever ready to be deflected, come what may!—with that daily store of vigour that got him over all the anfractuosities of mighty Apennines and adverse fate alike, and through the doldrums of suffocating, malarious maremmas. In the last years of all—why do I think of him as something like a lone tree, now grown to its finest fullness? How serene is this ash—the surrounding denizens fascinated by the tricks and surprises that issue from its foliage . . .

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Not that he was always here, in Italy. Gone long ago was that house on the Posilipo and the succeeding ones on Capri. But he did always come back—even the last time of all. Thus North and South are met again in perfect union. The sailors have been battling up the draughts of the Bristol Channel on their vessel laden with wine, and now they have returned, returned! They are here in the warm gales of Ponza and Capri: *Salute!* Tomorrow will see them on the hills among the olives . . . And a few weeks or months later will see Douglas in Florence again, with several books in the making. Even the posthumous *Venus in the Kitchen* can be one of these, cooking up as it was for several years, from the late twenties onward—along with that unprintable, unpublished collection of Florentine cabmen's oaths that he had assembled and of which he said that it was "every bit as Italian as Dante or Donatello . . ."

To which does he belong most, to Florence where he lived for about sixteen years in a lovely apartment overlooking the river, at 14 Lungarno delle Grazie (the number now changed to 24), or to Capri and Calabria—old loves already since his first visit to Italy in 1888? To Capri—paramountly; yet, of course, not to Capri alone. Florence was quite otherwise, something of a "business-proposition", although he was fond of it up to a point—as used to be made clear amid his testy expostulations on the score of what it was becoming. And why was this?

Because of the lucky and useful thing that occurred there to Douglas and Orioli alike in 1922. It was just that they met then!

They became great friends and there was soon a business-tie between them, when Orioli—already well-established as an expert in rare books—went into publishing and produced some of Douglas's works, while Douglas, benefiting from his friend's technical knowledge, soon began publishing his own books in signed, limited editions. This was the main reason for his settling in Florence and an excellent decision it proved, for, thanks to much hard work on his part, the entire editions would sell out almost immediately. In 1930, *Nerinda* (says Orioli) "went off so

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well that soon not a copy was left and I was sorry I had printed only 475 of them, as the demand continued a good, long time”.

These two were not only at work—with Orioli’s scatter-brained apprentice, who forgot everything, running between them, so that “Whenever Norman Douglas had a message for me he used to write it in the palm of Achmet’s hand with an indelible pencil . . .” (says Orioli)—but often on journeys together in Tuscany, the Abruzzi, the Apennines, Calabria and on the Sorrentine Peninsula. Sant’ Agata here was an old favourite and Orioli beheld the spot—the Casa degli Spiriti—where *Siren Land* was begun in 1908.

Throughout his *Moving Along—Just a Diary* are some admirable descriptions of the way Douglas appeared to savour every moment of those strenuous journeyings among the Calabrian mountains. At one moment, after days in trains, cars, buses, riding and on foot, all of it in what sounds like an icy spring, they have reached Albidona at dusk, headed for Trebisacce, miles away. They are wet through and chilled; there is no inn and but scant food. All is misery! And then they find the place where wine is sold. The description is too fine not to be quoted, for it is the most revealing passage on how Douglas would set about tackling what seems to be adversity personified:

“A dark room . . . One chair in the room, no light of any kind, a small brazier of lighted charcoal on the floor, and a few wooden boxes to sit on. An old man bent nearly in two was the owner of this establishment. He lit a feeble oil lamp; there is no electricity in Albidona and the streets were now dark. It was better than nothing . . .

“Norman said he felt quite at home here. He was really in Old Calabria now, and I could see he was enjoying it. We could sit round the brazier all night, he said, getting our clothes dry gradually, smoking our pipes and drinking wine. What more could anybody want? As to sleeping—damn it, if one cares to sleep, one need only rest one’s elbows on one’s knees and put one’s head in one’s hands, and there you are. Delicious!”

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They were saved from this all-night vigil by the local policeman, at first very ill-disposed, but whose attitude changed entirely as soon as he was shown a cutting "out of some Italian paper, in which Norman's books on this part of the country were well spoken of."

Now comes the revealing beam—what a practised traveller he was, that ready mother-wit of his always to hand!

In this remote hill-village the policeman suddenly produced (of all things) a journalist! He arrived, as Orioli describes, ". . . accompanied by a friend; they were both young men of about twenty-four and both of them sickly-looking. We exchanged some elaborate compliments and greetings; then the journalist set to work. He asked questions and his friend wrote down the answers in longhand, while the other was thinking out the next question to ask. Norman gave them a marvellous interview; I only wish some journalist of real experience had been there. They were both infatuated with him. I never heard him speak like that about Calabria. When he talks to me, he swears at the filthy food and accommodation, the pestilential bugs, and the beastly malaria which he caught there. Now he said that there was no such country on earth, and he named renowned persons and places and products and customs which the journalist had never heard of, and which perhaps never existed. His friend took it all down furiously, and Norman's talk sounded to me like a condensation of old Barrius, who wrote a wonderful book in praise of this country. Nothing was too good for Calabria! It was a Paradise, and its people the most charming and handsome and cultured in the whole world. What a grand historical tradition, what rivers and mountains, what a climate, what lovely women . . ."

That is real "essence of Douglas"!

3

Some Thoughts on his Writing

AS a humourist he rings out high and clear and without striving—humour is one ore in the rich and complicated amalgam of his being, whose best moments in writing belong to the stratosphere of pure and undefinable inspiration. And if that last word generally finds its place next to some great dramatic moment in Letters, it may certainly fit his wit as well—his wit, for instance, in that Preface to *Alone*—one of the most brilliant things he has written.

For ebullient inventiveness, a passage in *Late Harvest* comes to mind. He is reminiscing about *South Wind* and this leads him to think of the kind of letters all authors would like to get—but never do! Here, among others, is one “model”:

“Dear D,

This is the limit. Last night I shrieked myself hoarse with laughing over your last story about the Armadillo and the Cardinal's niece. What must she have thought? And the Armadillo, pensive and resigned. Now what I say is this. A fellow who can make you laugh so much deserves something for his trouble. And let me tell you I've just thought of something. You know Uncle Fred left me his place at Hampstead, including that priceless 'Library'. I've been selling the muck to Snaggs as fast as I can by the cart-load. But there's one lot he won't touch. Seven shelves of erotica or whatever you call it. I've looked at some

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of the drawings. Good God. No wonder he won't touch them. They take some beating. But just your style. The old dodderer used to swear that he spent a life-time over the collection and that it was worth over two thousand. I ought to warn you that he was a bit of a liar. If he wasn't, so much the better for you. Because the whole batch goes to you by Carter Paterson this afternoon. About a ton of books, I should say. You will want to fix them up in your studio. If you do, no respectable man or woman will care to be seen there. That doesn't matter in the least. They don't care to be seen there anyway, do they?

Yours ever,

.

Although there is a great deal of laughter in many of his books, whether it arise from wit, or peculiar situations, or extraordinary figures (such as that holy leader of *The Little White Cows in South Wind*), the pages in *Alone* describing the vicissitudes of Craufurd Tait Ramage in southern Italy in 1828 are among the most ineffable. Delicious man! Ramage set out to visit *every single site* mentioned in classical literature, dressed in what, to the mountain-folk, was a terrifying garb. It was mainly white; he wore a great straw hat and held aloft the remains of a black umbrella against the sun (other signs of something devilish); it was never out of his hand and he was once "prepared to show fight with" it. How Douglas makes one relish this old Scottish clergyman (he was young at the time, though), rushing "all over the country copying inscriptions"! Douglas himself greatly savoured that book—made from copious daily notes—which was published only forty years later: *The Nooks and By-ways of Italy*.

"Note the predominance of white in his attire"—he says. "It was popular, at that period, with English travellers. Such men, however, were unknown in most of the regions which Ramage explored. The colour must have inspired feelings akin to awe in the minds of the natives, for white is their *bête noire*. They have a rooted aversion from it and never employ it in their clothing, because it suggests to their fancy the idea of bloodlessness—of

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anaemia and death. If you want to make one of them ill over his dinner, wear a white waistcoat.

“Accordingly, it is not surprising that he sometimes finds himself ‘an object of curiosity’. An English Vice-Consul at one place was ‘quite alarmed at my appearance’. Elsewhere he meets a band of peasant-women who ‘took fright at my appearance and scampered off in the utmost confusion’. And what happened at Taranto? By the time of his arrival in that town his clothes were already in such a state that ‘they would scarce fit an Irish beggar’. Umbrella in hand—he is careful to apprise us of this detail—and soaked moreover from head to foot after an immersion in the river Tara, he entered the public square, which was full of inhabitants, and soon found himself the centre of a large crowd. Looking, he says, like a drowned rat, his appearance caused ‘great amazement’.

“‘What is the matter? Who is he?’ they asked.

“The muleteer explained that he was an Englishman, and ‘*that immediately seemed to satisfy them*’.

“Of course it did. People in those times were prepared for anything on the part of an Englishman, who was a far more self-assertive and self-confident creature than nowadays.”

A typical Douglas conclusion!

A perfect example of his type of humour is the story of the Hen. It is in *Siren Land*, in that delicious essay-or-what-you-will, called “Rain on the Hills” and Douglas has been musing quite beautifully about the fantastic fishes, and their legends, in these waters; about the Dolphin and his supposed love for man. Some kind of lunch is in the making in this back-of-beyond little inn, and still the great rain is coming down, down, down like spears, and—in all—it is a perfect moment for musing and ruminating. A sea cat, “covered with a sort of fur”, sometimes eaten, though generally not, has engaged his attention for a moment; and next, well . . .

“Shall I tell you of the sea-turtle and how, every now and then, a ‘marine flea’ crawls under its flapper, which makes it very angry, because, at such times, it can only swim sideways in an

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absurd fashion, and all the other fishes laugh at it and pull its tail, till at last—”

“Will the food never come? Whatever else they are up there on the hills no one could be more helpful and full of suggestions; their fish soup made of *guarracini* and *scorfani* and *aguglie* and *toteri* has been turned down and his description of its ingredients (one might almost say of its ‘inhabitants’) would make anyone exclaim with him ‘Not on your life’. Now here is the girl again, and she says:

“‘Perhaps the signore would prefer a hen?’

“No, thank you. I know those hens and how they are caught. This is the manner of it. The careful housewife singles out the scraggiest of her fowls, which forthwith stops eating and watches her steadily with one eye, doubtless aware of her intentions. The preliminary coaxing being of no avail (it is merely done for form’s sake), five small boys are despatched in pursuit with sticks and stones. They begin by liking the job, for their prey, sure of victory, marches straight in front of them without deigning to look round, an easy mark for projectiles. One stone grazing its tail, it takes flight and settles in the vineyards on the hill-side, among howls of execration from the boys. Other pursuers are roused and join in the chase; a cloud of missiles envelops the bird as it gallops and flutters over stones and up trees, into gullies and thickets; the rabble vanishes from sight—you can hear them shouting a mile off.

“An hour or so having elapsed, the hen is seen, a speck on the horizon, flying down from the mountains in a straight line, pressed hard by an undaunted knot of pursuers. *Sant’ Antonio!* It is going into the water like last year! And, sure enough, it glides into the water and begins to preen its remaining feathers. May its mother be barren! May its children die unblest! The boat—the boat! It is launched, and at the very moment when the oar is about to descend with a crash upon the muscular frame of the victim, it rises like a lark and perches upon the roof of the church. *A chi t’è morto!* Out with the ladder! All work ceases in the village; the school is closed for the day; the priest and the

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tobacconist, mortal enemies, are observed to exchange a few breathless words. Bedridden hags crawl into the piazza and ask whether there is an earthquake. No, the hen! The church! The signore! The foreign signore wants the hen—the hen on the church! Just as the nimble *figlio di Luisella* has placed his foot upon the last rung of the ladder—*Ah, Santo Dio!* It has flown away, away into the brushwood, where none but the swiftest and surest-footed can hope to follow.

“Towards Ave Maria it is carried in, vanquished. The conqueror, streaming with perspiration and attended by the entire populace, proudly holds it up for your inspection by one leg—the other is missing. A small boy, reluctantly, produces it from his pocket.

“Is this a hen?

“There is not a vestige of feathers on its body; the head, too, seems to have come off in the heat of the fray. The conqueror tells you that he could have shot it, but was afraid of spoiling its plumage. The careful housewife asks whether you will have it boiled or *al cacciatore*?

“What is left of the bird looks as if it were already half cooked. . . .”

How about Europe? goes with a tremendous swing; as soon as you think you have come to a climax and that laughter can go no further, he caps his point with one or two, or three quips more—which is also very typical of him. They really were like fugues verbally, those unexpected themes of his, set going and elaborately developed in rushing spontaneity! Alas that no notes were taken by me at such moments . . . Impossible! It would have been adversely viewed, cutting across the flow of talk like a stone through the window; I can almost hear the crash of glass and certain other echoes along with it at the mere thought of such a thing . . .

The more one thinks of it the more peculiar it seems—that utter lack of feeling in Douglas for poetry, “*Except for the*

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poems of the Greek Anthology", he would immediately say, "and some of Shakespeare". He had of course read the great poetry, and the lesser, in our language and that of the other tongues at his command, besides the classics. A considerable number of contemporary poems came to him while he was on *The English Review* where, incidentally, he was one of the few critics in England to recognise the talent of the American poet Robert Frost, at the first appearance of his poems in this country.

With his great admiration and feeling for beauty, originality and the well-expressed, one would have imagined that Chaucer, Dante, Villon and Heine—to name only four—would have been appreciated by him, and he says in *Alone* that he had "a Shelley period". It passed! (And why just Shelley?)

Whatever the reason, he can hardly get away with *not* being called a considerable poet himself in the stuff and texture of many of his prose-passages, where style and subject take wing together and rise above the everyday ground. Two examples from *Siren Land*:

(1) "*The olive likes a good shiver once a year. These trees are small in size, mere pigmies beside the writhing monsters of Spain and Greece and Apulia; their upper limbs are stretched in a nervous tension which is the despair of artists, but in those tumid roots there sits—to all appearances—a deep repose. Yet who can tell what passionate alchemy is astir in that subterranean laboratory, sustaining life and fashioning fruit through those scorching summer months, among stones that are often too hot to handle?*"

(2) "*Citrella, poised like a swallow's nest upon its windswept limestone crags; far below the titanic grandeur of South Capri and the dimpled ocean, strewn with submarine boulders that make it look, from such aerial heights, like a map of the moon enamelled in the matchless blues and greens of a Damascus vase.*"

What an inlay—a concentration of images so well used that the effect, spare and rich all in one, is like the polished beauty of some old Italian marble mosaic. Such is his apparently effortless craft: everything fits and all is of the finest.

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And the two following thoughts—which are practically the same—do they not seem one of the best definitions of the true artist that one has ever come across? Of Isabelle Eberhardt, in his *Experiments*: “*Like all artists, she detects colours and shapes invisible to the common eye.*”

And more lyrically put in *Paneros*, like a sapphire catching and holding the very light of poetry: “*Learn to foster an ardent imagination; so shall you descry beauty which others pass unheeded.*”

All the more surprising (in *Alone*) are his conclusions on re-reading Théophile Gautier and Baudelaire, when, after due tribute to their many qualities in form, savour and image, both now seem to him “outgrown”! “Things which used to give us something of a thrill. If they no longer provide that sensation, it may well be that we have absorbed their spirit so thoroughly into our system that we forget whence we drew it. They have become part of ourselves . . .” Strange reasoning this, to say the very least!

Much more understandable is it that modern English poetry, as well as French, should strike him as artificial; its “abstractness”, for instance.

And there was always rather an awkward moment when someone asked for his opinion on some recently-written poem and put it into his hands—as I have seen occur four or five times:

“We-ll, ye-es . . . That seems all ri-ght, qui-te all ri-ght . . .” his innate politeness (and desire to be done with the uncomfortable subject too, bedamn!) evoking this particular, absent-minded drawl which floated out between a few puffs at his pipe. Non-committal at best. In any case: subject dismissed! Such was invariably the way of it.

There is actually one charming poem by him, the only one in print, first published in *Unprofessional Tales* and later in *Experiments*—that accomplished and elegantly-turned little piece with an 18th-century flavour called “Anacreontic—Cowley-Fashion.”

His knowledge of music was very considerable (he had been a pupil of Anton Rubinstein) and the study of it played a large part in his education, although he is dismissive of his instrumental

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capacities in that charming passage in *Alone* which reveals him at the piano—as a child. Muriel Draper refers to him as “an accomplished musician”. Elsewhere he has been called “a far better than average pianist”.

Brahms, Chopin, Mozart, much of Beethoven—such were his favourites, with the stress on the first-named, on whom are some beautiful lines at the end of the same book. He is walking near Ferento, not far from Viterbo in Italy, when there suddenly comes into his head “a wistful intermezzo of Brahms”.

“It seemed to spring out of the hot earth. Such a natural song, elvishly coaxing! Would I ever play it again? Neither that, nor any other.

“It turned my thoughts, as I went along, to Brahms and led me to understand why no man, who cares only for his fellow-creatures, will ever relish that music. It is an alien tongue, full of deeps and rippling shadows uncomprehended of those who know nothing of lonely places; full of thrills and silences such as are not encountered among the habitations of men. It echoes the multitudinous voice of nature, and distils the smiles and tears of things non-human. This man listened, all alone; he overheard things to which other ears are deaf—things terrible and sweet; the sigh of some wet Naiad by a reedy lake, the pleadings and furies of the genii—of those that whisper in woodlands and caverns by the sea, and ride wailing on thunder-laden clouds, and rock with ripe laughter in sunny wildernesses. Brahms is the test. Whoso dreads solitude will likewise dread his elemental humour.”

Is that not written by someone with a great feeling for music?

His tastes in painting . . . Actually, architecture was more to his liking, which is, of course, to beg the question! His feeling in art was for classical antiquity, Greek, Roman and Oriental, and of painters and painting there is not very much in his writings.

“He is the favourite of the gods,” Douglas wrote, “who knows the right word and when to utter it”, and Naomi Lewis

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added a pithy comment on this aphorism in her review of *An Almanac*: "There is nothing painful or precious about his choice of words; it seems, like many of his actions, fortunate and direct—the sculptor's blow on the marble."

Yet he is full, himself, of "colour" terms—in that (excusing the cliché) he painted a good deal with words—a sweep over generous surfaces, and little brush-strokes of exactness, mosaic-combinations. In most of his books are sensuous and exquisite delineations of nature. It may be done "con brio" or in a moonlit mood. Rock and plain, desert or estuary will bear some sudden thought; such unexpected off-shoots are never out of place for all their strangeness at the moment, are never out of tone. Scenery being alive the whole time, a description of it must be related to the kind of day it is, the mood of that particular moment. Such things Douglas seizes and reproduces remarkably well.

In the chapter on Mentone in the early pages of *Alone* we find:

"My second joyful memory centres round another thing of beauty—a spiky agave (miscalled aloë) of monstrous dimensions. Many are the growths of this kind which I have admired in many lands; none can vaunt as proud and harmonious a development as this one. You would say it had been cast in some dull blue metal. The glaucous wonder stands by itself, a prodigy of good style . . . It is flawless. Vainly have I teased my fancy, endeavouring to discover the slightest defect in shape or hue. Firm-seated on the turf, in exultant pose, with a pallid virginal bloom upon whose mighty writhing leaves, this plant has drawn me like a magnet, day after day, to drink deep draughts of contentment from its exquisite lines."

One could say that he actually captures the light as it moves, changing. That long passage about the rocks seen from the sea in *South Wind* must be one of the most glowing pieces of nature-writing in existence. And what of another of his "canvases" high in tone, where perhaps one of Turner's most glorious sunbursts comes to mind?—these lines on the island of Ponza in his *Summer Islands*:

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“Caverns opening upon the waves in pillared stateliness . . . Precipices of lava and softer material that glow in brightest hues of white, blood-red, and green; of pearl-grey and black and yellow. The most singular thing is that these tints do not melt into one another by any gradations—they are as sharply defined as the various countries upon a coloured map. Improbable; dreamlike; too strange, maybe, to please the imagination of everyday artists and poets. I had almost forgotten to mention the chief feature of this phantasmagoria—those stainless sheets of mauve and heliotrope, pure as a curtain of silk, which descend from vine-clad uplands down to the beach where fishermen sit mending their nets for the coming night’s work . . . Why do those veins of dull pitchstone put on a poisonous metallic shimmer of verdigris, while the headlands of brown trachyte blaze like incandescent rubies and amethysts? Is it something in their massing together? The sea—the sun?”

Assessments of his writings have been legion in periodicals in England and the United States. There is the admirable little book by Richard MacGillivray (Professor Dawkins) and that by H. M. Tomlinson—both written some twenty years ago and both republished now with additions. In 1953 came Constantine Fitz-Gibbon’s excellent *Norman Douglas, A Pictorial Record*, and Kenneth Macpherson’s vivid and loving tribute, *Omnes Eodem Cogimur*. The *Soho Bibliography* by Cecil Woolf should be in print before this book is published. There is the long and well-documented article in *The Times Literary Supplement* of July 4, 1952, and the fine one by John Davenport in *The XXth Century* of April 1952, and a charming account of Douglas on Capri by Sylvia Norman in *The Fortnightly* of August 1952. The study by Elizabeth Wheatley in the *Sewanee Review* of January 1932 must be one of the best things written on him in the States. And there were two successful exhibitions of his books, with drawings and photographs of him and some Douglasiana, arranged in Scotland a few months after his death by Alan Anderson.

While *South Wind* was a startling best seller—it went into three editions the year it came out, in 1917, and has been put on the

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stage recently in England—inspiring and influencing any number of the novels of its time, including some of the early ones of Aldous Huxley, Douglas himself has been portrayed (variously and sometimes with “the novelist’s touch”) in books by Compton Mackenzie, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Louis Golding, G. Orioli and Muriel Draper.

A student of his work may find these more available than what has been written about him in Italy, where, among much else, one of the foremost critics, Mario Praz, who holds the Chair of English at Rome University, has said: “Of foreigners he is among the best to have understood us”, and, “We Italians will certainly never forget the man who revealed to us many aspects of the magic of our southern provinces.”

What of the influences to be found in his works, and what of the *inspiration* that comes to a writer from that mysterious thing, *affinity of thought*? “The Greeks” is the answer—as generally agreed—but by no means all of it. Professor Dawkins finds in him “the same fundamental hardness, in which man is so close to nature, and this quality we can see even in their treatment of their own language. The spirit of hard extroverted estheticism, in which the Greeks have shaped their language, seems to be much akin to that of Douglas.” And again, “He is the man of all others in the present world of letters who stands nearest to the ancient Greek point of view. Such a man can look at nature even in her most ruthless aspects and not be shocked into pessimism. . . . I do not know anyone who has seen so deeply into their poets as he has. He feels himself of their kin, and what he says of them—the passage is in *One Day*—is exactly what I feel of Douglas himself:

These pages (of the Anthology) might well be regarded as a textbook of good manners. What are good manners but the outward expression of kindness? And what is kindness but common sense? That is why reasonable folk of whatever class or nationality are always kind and well-mannered . . . It was part of their general health and balance of faculties. They compassed it by well-directed curiosity.

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They looked outwards and saw themselves surrounded by a host of tangible things, fellow-creatures and beasts and mountains and woodland and waters; they regulated their behaviour in accordance with these mundane necessities and so attained terrestrial values. Whence, in the older epigrams, that sense of direct contemplation of nature, that eye for detail, that touch of earth—bitter or sweet. Slowly it fades away. Even before the . . . Christian era concrete imagery tends to be replaced by abstractions. The process was never arrested . . . A kind of spiritual dimness had begun to creep over the world.

What the poets of the Anthology had to say he has heard . . .

The passage I have just quoted makes us feel that Douglas is the true extrovert, and that in this kind of writing he is fully on his own ground."

But of inspirers, Italy, of course, is the greatest of all—its people, its regions and its plain day-to-day life: not its art and not its books. No; this must be rectified! Its art, in the sense of Greek remains, and Roman, as well as the writings of certain ancient chroniclers that few can have studied as much as he—these too are part of the Italian animus. The birds and the lizards and the things of the hills are his poets.

Of influences, and supposed influences on him—well!

No one better and more meticulous in detail than John Davenport in his critical study, mentioned above. "One of the proofs of Norman Douglas's originality is that such a number of writers should have been claimed by critics to have influenced him. No fewer than 32 of them have been listed, from Beckford to Wilde." Then follow the names of Apuleius, Zeno, Petronius, of Darwin and Nietzsche—the latter because "he was the upholder of the aristocratic individualism he (Douglas) respected . . . He was a 19th-century eclectic. The idealism of Pythagoras was abhorrent to him; he preferred the facts of Pausanias and Pliny to the theories of Plato and Plotinus, the gossip of Athenaeus to the metaphysics of Aeschylus. Herodotus he loved; the Greek lyricists; Theocritus; Catullus; Petronius; Lucretius."

"The influence of Douglas," he says elsewhere, "can be seen

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in the work of many young English writers. The early novels of Aldous Huxley are all heavily indebted to him. Incidentally, Huxley never wrote as well as in this period."

John Davenport sums up on what he has called "this uneasy company of 32" by saying: "He was like none of his literary forebears or contemporaries, yet it was possible to see why—however rightly or wrongly—each name might from time to time have been invoked, because he was so utterly, in a commonplace age, himself. He fitted into no category . . . He was self-contained, for all his sociability in essence a solitary."

"He fitted into no category"—How are you going to "label" him?

Now let Douglas speak for himself; what he says is to the point for all time on that score! It is a tirade about reviewers (in *Alone*). He was annoyed because certain critics had said there was "no plot" in *South Wind*. Come, come now, says he: "How to make murder palatable to a bishop: that is the plot. How? You must unconventionalise him." And then he proceeds:

"I know full well that it is not easy to write an orthodox English novel. For if you hide your plot, how shall the critic be expected to see it? You must serve it on a tray; you must (to vary the simile) hit the nail on the head and ask him to be so good as to superintend the operation. That is the way to rejoice the cockles of his heart. He can then compare you to someone else who has also hit the nail on the head and with whose writings he happens to be familiar. You have a flavour of Dostoevsky *minus* the Dickens taint; you remind him of Flaubert or Walter Scott or somebody equally obscure; in short, you are in a condition to be labelled—a word, and a thing, which comes perilously near to libelling."

Without going anywhere near "labelling", one may, however, stress that, as influences and inspirations, the Greeks are ever prevalent. His feeling for Attica is radiantly manifest in *Birds and Beasts of the Greek Anthology*; *One Day* is in another Peloponnesian mood; and much of *Paneros*, though not so specifically, has

Essay on Douglas

an aroma of the same classical antiquity. All three are by a man with a profound love, knowledge and understanding of Greek form, writing and civilisation.

Of things Islamic too, if in a lesser degree. For *Fountains in the Sand* (about Tunisia) shows a great deal of perception, interest and speculation anent Arab life. None of this is any more romanticised than are his writings on other themes. And why should it be? He never worked that way, except in his three novels—which are more full of inventiveness and irony than of romance, at that. The essential values and the immediately visible surface ones here, among these people of Mahomet, are meticulously, now-critically, now-admiringly rendered.

Why has the word “romanticising” come to me?

Because, thinking about his very important and great qualities as a critic—so active a force that it is almost like a presence by you as you read whatever he is *analysing* and *assessing*—there come to mind some admirable passages of his on the *descriptive* gift in writing as opposed to the artificial, romanticised, rhetorical type. Just that. The comparison opens out into a perspective of English and French, with some very interesting conclusions.

He is setting the ruggedness and “cussedness” of Doughty in his gaunt Arabian desert against certain French books on the Orient, examining Doughty’s reserve and objectivity and the romanticised visions of Loti and the Frères Tharaud. The passages are from his essay on Doughty’s *Arabia Deserta* (written for *The London Mercury* in 1921 and reprinted in *Experiments*).

Loti’s *Désert*, he says, is: “A cloying and tinkling performance; as voiceless, almost as voiceless, as a picture on the wall. Where, you ask, where is the shrewd wit, the insight, the humanity of Montaigne? And that other one about Constantinople, or about Morocco: how prettily constructed, how unconvincing! Yet Loti is a writer of renown; there is no gainsaying those exquisite gifts. What militates against his, and his countrymen’s, veracity in a personal relation like *Le Désert* is professionalism—and one or two other little things. Lack of humility, for instance; or call it simple imperviousness to foreign languages and ideals. They

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are curiously incurious, again, as to matters non-human; even the Goncourts' *Journal* is full of queer blunders of observation; they seem to have inherited somewhat from those old Troubadours to whom the human element was everything, and who would not utilise nature as a mere scenic decoration against which to display their emotions, their *sensations d'Orient* or whatever it might be."

All of this is connected with books on travel, and these pages seem to me to belong to some of the finest analysis in all of Douglas's writing.

The perfect traveller, he says, should be an amateur. That is, non-professional makers of travel-books are better observers; they are fresher, more independent-minded, and so on—therefore more apt to write spontaneously about what they have seen. It must not be derivative, what they say, but individual; no harm at all in a strong bias, if it be their nature to express such! Above all, the traveller who writes books must himself have an interesting personality; the reader wants to travel within the author's mind as well, as he proceeds with him on his way: "The writer should therefore possess a brain worth exploring; some philosophy of life—not necessarily, though by preference, of his own forging—and the courage to proclaim it and put it to the test; he must be naïf and profound, both child and sage. Who is either the one or the other in these days, when the whole trend of existence makes for the superficial and commonplace, when a man writes with one eye on his publisher and the other on his public?"

Douglas is magnificent about Doughty in that long essay, analysing his use of rock-like words, the gigantic scale of it all, the sudden, sharp pictures that spring into being unexpectedly—nay, alarmingly . . . the character of the man—of whom he said (as Acton recalls) "His purpose was refreshingly anti-utilitarian, although, in his own words he hoped to add something to the common fund of Western knowledge."

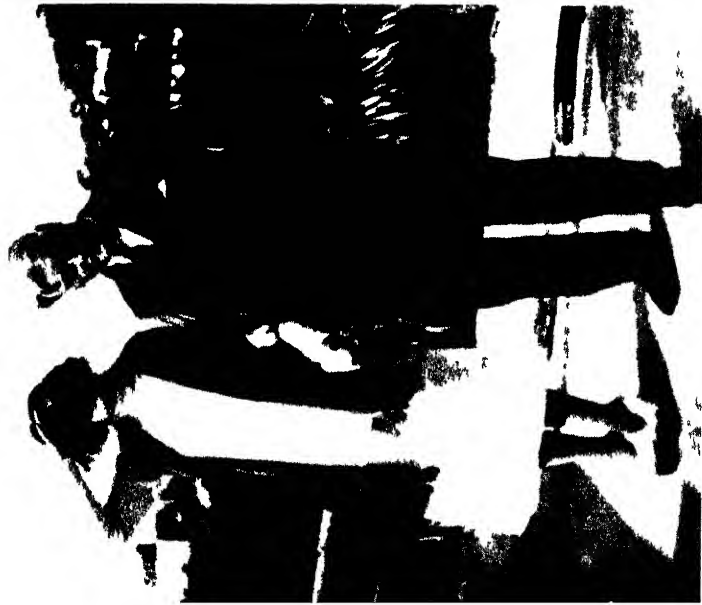
Proceeding with his comparison between certain French and English books that deal with travel and exotic lands, he says:

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“The Anglo-Saxon has a laxer literary discipline, commendable distrust of authority, a language that lends itself gaily to the unburdening of extremest individualism; and not only that. His educational system (despite the efforts of that old disciplinarian and prayer-monger) and the very laws of his country induce him to break away from the parent-stock. He is centrifugal. Without abdicating an ounce of self-respect he can merge himself into anything and assimilate what you please. He makes a good nomad.”

And so does Douglas. He must be one of the best in literature—along with Borrow and Sterne.

It is odd to think that the word “amateur” has sometimes been used in connection with him as a writer! In all fairness, despite the shock this produces, it must be said that its usual association (the half of its meaning generally thought of first!) with unprofessional incompetence, or something like that, was not intended. Amateur—a *true lover of*, is, I suppose, what was meant; but the queazy implication remains. He *was* a true lover of writing, for the sake of writing (although possibly he might half object to this, having said, and in print too, that he only wrote books so as to make enough money on which to live—and doesn’t *that* sound rather professional?) but he was also a superb technician. “Amateur” is wrong, all wrong; as wrong as it is to label him “a hedonist”. Was Byron an “amateur” because well-off and a Lord? Douglas was not a Lord, but of the leisured class and he did not start writing books and novels at an early age because he had ample money then; he did not go into the business of turning out literature, or become a reviewer or a journalist as a young man—which, I suppose, would *ipso facto* have made him “professional”! Before 1907 he did not have to work for his living, not even in part. But he had already written many scientific papers and learned, recondite Monographs on Capri and Italian medieval history. That unfortunate sharp change in his fortunes has been of great benefit to English Letters, and now that all the results are with us, it seems idle to wonder if, with his many



N.D. with Faith Mackenzie

1925



N.D. with Osbert Sitwell, Ian Greenlees and Pino Orioli (*behind*) at Florence

1933

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great gifts, he really would not otherwise have produced all of his books.

Certainly no one is more "professional" and "non-amateur" than he in the light of craftsmanship, where he is unassailable. That word "amateur"! How it fusses one; it is too close to "amateurish". Does it not uneasily suggest that some of his books, maybe, are not quite so well written as others? Criticise him in any legitimate way, but *not* thus! Prefer this, that or the other, as is logical, yet observe how he is always up to the mark in one and all. And that is probably rather unusual in a writer.

If specific proof be needed of the discipline of his first-rate mind, there are most interesting things in *Looking Back*, where he seems to be merely thinking aloud, not laying down any particular law, and here, to the fore, is the critic in him. On what? Amongst much else, on the role of dialogue and on diffuseness in style. He is remembering D. H. Lawrence—that redundancy of his: "He sometimes turned up at the *English Review* office with stories like *The Prussian Officer* written in that impeccable handwriting of his. They had to be cut down for magazine purposes; they were too redundant; and I was charged with the odious task of performing the operation. Would Lawrence never learn to be more succinct and to hold himself in hand a little? No; he never would and he never did; diffuseness is a fault of much of his work. Those endless and pointless conversations! That dreary waste of words! To give your reader a sample of the chatter of third-rate people is justifiable; ten consecutive pages of such stuff is realism gone crazy. Lawrence never divined that conversations and dialogues are precious contrivances, to be built up *con amore*; that they should suggest a clue to character and carry forward the movement instead of retarding it; that they should be sparkling oases, not deserts of tiresome small-talk."

As for what he calls "the novelist's touch"—what excellent findings are these (in his *Maurice Magnus* pamphlet) on the novelist's touch in biography: "It consists, I should say, in a failure to realise the profundities and complexities of the ordinary human mind; it selects for literary purposes two or three facets of a man

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or woman, generally the most spectacular and therefore 'useful' ingredients of their character, and disregards all others. What fails to fit in with these specially chosen traits is eliminated; must be eliminated, for otherwise the description would not hold water . . . The facts may be correct, so far as they go, but there are too few of them; what the author says may be true, and yet by no means the truth. That is the novelist's touch. It falsifies life."

Joseph Conrad has been called "a great psychologist", he reminds us. "Well, Conrad was first and foremost a Pole, and, like many Poles, a politician and a moralist *malgré lui*. These are his fundamentals. He was also a great writer with hardly an ounce of psychology in his composition. His genius is the reverse of the psychologist's; it consists in driving you along by main force; in making characters work out their salvation according to the approved principles not of psychology but of British morality, of the "right thing to do". Everything that deviates from this precarious standard was anathema to him . . . He seldom explored the human heart, that wonderful tangle of motives pure and impure (as they are called)—which was a pity, for he might have picked up some humour as he went along; he never so much as glanced down into its depths lest he should discover, down in those muddy recesses, something rotten, something which had no right to be there. Can a man who lacks sympathy with erring humanity give us a convincing picture of it? He can give us no more than what Conrad gave: a convincing proof of how much may be accomplished without psychology."

In Douglas's *Fountains in the Sand* is a French engineer, Dufresnoy, and there is a good deal about this acute, cynical imperialist. Now, did he really exist thus? Not quite, he says. One must take one's characters and re-create them in a certain measure. But this is very far from the "novelist's touch" school which batted and grew fat on caricaturings and mis-representations of people known to such authors. The *Magnus* pamphlet can be read on these grounds alone by anyone interested in sheer (and lively) literary criticism. In the middle twenties—says he—you could "hardly pick up a volume by a member of this school without

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finding therein caricatures of some acquaintance—all unfavourably drawn and derided not with frank wit or invective, but with that squeaky suburban chuckle which is characteristic of an age of eunuchs.”

What would restore a cleaner way of writing? Duelling!—no less.

In *Alone* are some masterly pages on Ouida, who is buried at Bagni di Lucca, having died in one of the featureless streets of Viareggio, alone, half blind, and in poverty. “She is now out of date. Why, yes. Those guardsmen who drenched their beards in scent and breakfasted off caviare and chocolate and sparkling Moselle—they certainly seem fantastic. They really were fantastic. The fact is, we were all rather ludicrous formerly. The characters of Dickens, to say nothing of Cruikshank’s pictures of them: can such beings ever have walked the earth?”

If her novels are somewhat faded, the same cannot be said of her letters and articles and critiques. Read them for their tone, their temper; for that pervasive good breeding, that shining honesty, that capacity of scorn. These are qualities which our present age lacks, and needs; they are conspicuous in Ouida. Abhorrence of meanness was her dominant trait . . . a woman of wide horizons who fought for generous issues and despised all shams . . . When she says that the world is ruled by two enemies of all beauty, commerce and militarism—out of date? When she dismisses Oscar Wilde as a *cabotin* and yet thinks that the law should not have meddled with him—is not that the man and the situation in a nutshell?”

Certainly one Italian opinion should find its place here, on account of the arresting angle—or point of departure—from which it is written, and that is “Douglas in the perspective of Italian Letters”.

It is that of Edwin Cerio in his richly-documented, admirably written big volume in Italian called *L’Ora di Capri* (1951), where he has told with elegant and scholarly continuity of the host of

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great literary travellers in Italy from the beginning of the records. One chapter is called "The Irreconcilables", of whom he says Douglas is "the Prince"—irreconcilable, that is, to living in the norm, clime and civilisation of those triangular islands of fog of which his nationality, but not his ego nor yet his spirit, made him a citizen by birth. Such, at least, is part of the meaning. Cerio gives Douglas his place in the historical perspective of all the great foreign writers in—and on—Italy, in the following manner:

From earliest times pilgrims and travellers flowed in; our own Chaucer met Petrarch in Padua, made him known in England and drew inspiration from Dante for his second, Italian-influenced period. There followed Rabelais, Martin Luther, Cervantes, Montaigne, while the first Englishman to set down his journey was Guylforde in his *Pylgrymage* early in the 16th century. Fynes Moryson, contemporary of Shakespeare, wrote an erudite account "full of materials for works of Italian background and inspiration".

After the journeys of Sandys, Wotton, Howell, Addison, the Letters of Charles des Brosses, Lord Orrery, and Winckelmann, a new art in Letters is born and soon blossoms into perfection—the art of describing things that have been seen and experienced: "a sort of literature of landscape on a high cultural level". "Thus," continues Cerio, "we come to the first masterpieces created out of the stuff of travel; they range from the *Italienische Reise* to *Corinne*, from the exaltation of Chateaubriand in front of the Campagna Romana to the Italian landscape dramatised in the Napoleonic *epopea* of Stendhal. After the romantic intermezzo of Byron and Shelley and the impassioned wanderings of Lady Blessington's *Idler in Italy* comes the revolt of Heine, the corrosive, Hebraic contempt and irony of his *Italienische Reisebilder*." Then follow Hans Andersen and the great Romantics: Georges Sand, Dickens, Lamartine, Gautier, Dumas Père with his fanfaronnades, Elizabeth Browning, poet of the unification of Italy, Tennyson with his exquisitely-turned verse evoking Lombard architecture and Tuscan landscape.

"And so the procession continues with poets and lesser

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novelists, culminating in the masterpiece of a philosopher and poet, with Taine's *Voyage en Italie*. Here the 19th century wrote its last thoughts on Italy before the next century should have its say. This came—and it came from the lips of Norman Douglas.”

“His *Siren Land*,” continues Cerio, “is the vessel which encloses the first words uttered by our century. Not his intention was it to linger in this work over the long cortège of erudite travellers eager for information, or to turn retrospectively to all the matter contained in the famous Grand Tours of yore. He takes the road himself just where it left off and it leads him into a so-far unexplored territory: the land of the Sirens. Leaving Capri with a suit-case full of those *Materials* he lands on the promontory of Campanella and there—among the ruins of an edifice whose hieratic name, Jerate, suggests the destruction of a temple on the spot—comes to him the apt moment in which to offer the English (always avid of such fare) an appropriate helping of a rite that is extant in all Mediterranean lands: that of the Sirens and their ancestry.”

Already in *Sea Lady* Wells has told the wondrous tale of such a being who came ashore on the strand at Folkestone—but she was an Oceanian. To Douglas she came, she and her kin, those other “provocative citizens of the deep, in a learned and conclusive monograph, her anatomy bound up with her mythology therein”. And *Siren Land*, he says, “is the spiritual guide of a part of the Gulfs of Naples and Salerno, the first refuge encountered by all those condemned to the grand circuit of Tourism!”

He makes an interesting comparison between travel-writers on the score of enquiring *curiosity*. Bishop Berkeley, for instance, and others of the 18th century, traversed all of the Calabrian regions, drawn thither by the possibility of the therapeutic properties that might exist in the state of *tarantismo*, which led so many hereabouts, near Taranto, into the frenzies of the tarantella dance.

“With a somewhat similar curiosity,” says Cerio, “extending however to an infinite variety of subjects, Douglas goes on his way, observing, and preserving in writing treasures of knowledge collected in every village and town he went to—nearly always on foot

Essay on Douglas

—exploring not only the remotest origins of the inhabitants but the deepest recesses of their spirit and of their psyche. It is in the Calabresi—who are made up of the most diverse Mediterranean race-elements wherein, possibly, the Greek one predominates—that he discovers the arch-type of *Homo Ibericus*, he of that ‘austere nobility’ (*austera signorilità*). All the pages of this book (*Old Calabria*) breathe out the perennially youth-filled life of an Italianate race (*razza italica*) differing in characteristics to other Italians by its very vitality which so many Christian centuries have not succeeded in strangulating.”

And here is his culminating thought:

“Fifty years of memories: such is *Looking Back*—an autobiography in which he talks of this, that and the other, and of himself just sufficiently and in the right way to show how the Faun of Scottish origin, on account of its wanderings in Italy (not the Etruscan Italy dear to D. H. Lawrence, but that beloved of the Phoenicians, the Saracens and the Greeks) came, as it did, to acquire the citizenship of Paganism.”

And now here are all of his works, every one of them briefly described in Part V of this book, and I think they may be quite well classified in this manner:

His three novels and one long story:

SOUTH WIND 1917

THEY WENT 1920

IN THE BEGINNING* 1927

NERINDA 1929

Travel Books, books about countries, in the form of enchanting essays and Belles Lettres:

Early Period: SIREN LAND 1911

FOUNTAINS IN THE SAND 1912

OLD CALABRIA 1915

Middle Period: ALONE 1921

TOGETHER 1923

* A new edition was published by The Folio Society in 1953, illustrated.

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Later Period: ONE DAY 1929
 CAPRI—MATERIALS FOR A DESCRIPTION OF
 THE ISLAND 1930
 SUMMER ISLANDS 1931
 FOOTNOTE ON CAPRI 1952
 (Posthumously published)

Largely autobiographical; the last-named is descriptive of his books:

LOOKING BACK 1933

LATE HARVEST 1946

Of Classical Inspiration:

BIRDS AND BEASTS OF THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY 1927

PANEROS 1930

Polemical:

D. H. LAWRENCE AND MAURICE MAGNUS—A PLEA FOR
BETTER MANNERS 1924

HOW ABOUT EUROPE? 1929

Criticism and Short Stories:

EXPERIMENTS 1925

Collected Axioms and Apothegms from his Works:

AN ALMANAC 1941

Games and Recipes:

LONDON STREET GAMES 1916

VENUS IN THE KITCHEN 1952 (Posthumously published)

In a class all by itself:

SOME LIMERICKS 1928

That makes 24. Or 25, if one counts the trilogy of reprints published in the volume called *Three of Them* (1930), consisting of *One Day*, *Nerinda* and the long, scientific monograph, *On the Herpetology of the Grand Duchy of Baden*, which came out first in *The Zoologist* in 1894. Or there are 26 books if *Unprofessional Tales* (1901) the first of all, be counted; it was written in collaboration with his wife, under the pseudonym of "Normyx".

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Many years later he rewrote some of these stories and published them in *Experiments*.

I have an affection for *The Herpetology*, a purely scientific paper on the markings of lizards and the strange ways of batrachians, the tempers of snakes, the adventures of frogs, and so on. Although it is duly full of Latin generic names, it also contains some personal touches that only he would have put in such a fashion.

Six or seven of Douglas's books have been translated, some of them into Scandinavian languages, others (or the same) into German and Portuguese; two into French (*Alone* and *One Day*, the latter in the Review *Echanges*); and none—so far—into Italian. How peculiar this seems. Surely Douglas, with his forty years of life in Italy, his knowledge of its people, regions and customs, and his eight books on the country or with an Italian background, is indicated for translation? Not one of these works could an Italian fail to appreciate! The translations, presumably, will come. But how slow they are being about it—despite the good praises of Italian critics and *letterati*.

As for Spain . . . Douglas asked me in London, during the war in 1942, if I knew anything of a firm in Barcelona which had just written him concerning *South Wind*. He was inclined to agree to a translation and wrote the firm to state their terms. And there the matter ended. Not a word more was ever heard. We wondered if fear of the state-controlled censorship had descended upon whoever was now examining—with a definite view to publication in Spanish—this gay and fantastic novel, in which matters are so arranged that a bishop cannot do else than appreciate the motives that lead to the murder of a blackmailer.

And now, after this brief essay,
let me reminisce.

It shall be *to you*, Norman.

How much has got lost in the
crevices of passing time—
although, to be sure,
not quite all . . .

II

LETTER TO NORMAN

4/ Hon^{ble} Neil Hogg
75^{ma} de S. Felix III
Lisbon
24 Nov 1941

Nancy Darling

Your lovely letter of the 7th arrived here this morning, together with another one from London — from Ian Greenlees; did you meet him when he stayed with me on the Riviera? — dated the 6th.

Still here, as you see; and I hope they won't kick me out round about Christmas, for I am less than ever in the mood for that kind of thing. Meanwhile I am visé'd till the 12 Dec. After that, we shall see. I mean to hang on as long as ever possible.

Don't bother about "Dalton's Weekly" for the moment. I should like to know some place in London where I can take refuge for 2-4 days after arriving, and try to acclimatise myself to England where I have not been for 25 years — a little more, in fact. I suppose people there still talk English? Anyhow, my pronunciation is sure to sound antiquated (Rogony, or something of that kind) and I can't understand half the jokes in Punch; but who can?

Facsimile of the first page of a letter from N.D. to the author

1

Earlier Memories

IT was nearly six years after *South Wind* came out in 1917 that we first met—with the Sitwells in Florence in February 1923. They had talked of you a good deal without saying anything very precise, and now, to my delight, they said we should meet. The aureole of legend around you was high in colour and, above all, mysterious. I would find it difficult, and even impossible, to say just what I was supposed to be prepared for! “You’ll see! You’ll see!” came from them delightedly, and not a word more.

In one of those preposterous *trattorie*, the name of which I forget, Osbert, Sacheverell, myself, and, I think, William Walton, were dining. As the meal reached its worst stage, when the choice has to be made between pink or green *zuppa inglese*, Osbert and Sachie became more and more agitated. They seemed almost in a dither, for you were to join us—if you kept your word.

Again I ventured: would they not tell me just a little—say, at least, what you looked like, or if you were alarming, which at great speed evoked something like this:

“I’m-sure-I-don’t-know-what-she’s-going-to-think-when-she-does-meet-him, Sachie . . . hmh, hmh . . . I suppose he is coming, what do you think?”

“Well, he *said* he’d come, Osbert.”

Letter to Norman

"I'm-sure-I-don't-know-how-it-will-all-go . . . Oh, delightful . . . very, very witty . . . hmh . . . You're sure to find him that, but"

"It's getting late, Osbert. It's past ten now and he said he'd come at ten sharp."

"Oh dear, what a bore. I must say I *do* hope he is coming, Sachie. Do you really think he will?"

"Well, he *said* he would, you know."

This went on for some time and I got slightly nervous.

"Will you please tell me if Douglas is difficult to talk to?"

"Oh no, not at all. I shouldn't say that, although of course . . . Well, you'll soon see. I suppose he *is* coming, Sachie, what do you think?"

(Was the famous author and personality going to appear in the light of some "*cher maître*"?)

"What *is* so mysterious about him, Osbert, Sachie? *Is* there something so particularly strange? Why won't you tell me anything?"

"Oh dear . . . What would you say, Sachie?"

"Oh, I really couldn't, Osbert . . ."

"Well, you'll soon see!", they plumped in chorus.

I could have screamed, I remember, at that moment. One had to shout anyway in that maddening place against the hubbub made by the garrulous diners in all the confusion of orders roared from one room to another, and the noise of the waiters colliding against our table, set, seemingly, between kitchen and lavatory. Of all the ghastly places to meet anyone in . . .

Nothing was to be got out of them, save, finally:

"I should be *careful* if I were you—hmh, hmh!"

I see now what they were doing! This was what Americans call "a great, big, build-up". And they were having such fun with me! That mysterious reputation of yours was too good not to be utilised, expressed to the last drop. Well, blessed be they as the divine instruments who—little knowing—brought you then and there into the perspective of my life!

Of course it was startling to be told at that moment:

Earlier Memories

"I should be *careful* if I were you . . ."

What could that possibly mean? A sudden, covert pill in my wine? A giddy moonlit drive round the town under the rug in an old cab?

"Oh come now—*do* say something about him!"

"Well . . . er . . . hmh, hmh . . . there's that little box of his . . ."

"*What?*"

"I suppose-he-may-come-yet", said Osbert, hmh-hmhmmed madly and hurrying away from my question.

Suddenly you were there beside us, having entered unseen, and you had a perfectly normal, if dignified and courteous presence: tallish, broad-shouldered, well-set, a man of fifty or so, I thought*—with a fine head, very clear-cut features, sharp tip to long nose, piercing blue-grey eyes of aquatic flint under thick, curving eyebrows, a rather florid or high complexion, an admirably neat outline of head and perfectly-trimmed, close-cut, partly grey hair—dressed in a mackintosh over a thick, well-tailored tweed suit—very forthright and straightforward in manner, as was at once apparent. Not in the least formidable! Beautiful bearing and beautiful breeding—*beaucoup de branche*, in fact.

You came and sat down beside me and after a moment pulled out an exquisite little *tabatière* and offered me some snuff. At this, Osbert's and Sachie's eyes gave a leap—"There now, see?"—as I took some for the first time in my life, you telling me how it should be done, the right spot on the hand. I had a good sniff; it was strange and delicious. As I continued not to sneeze, I wondered if this would seem a sign of anything in particular to you. Apparently not!

We had a good, long look at one another. I remember *that* moment extraordinarily well.

"What do you find to do here?", you presently asked me.

"I've been in Florence two weeks now, and oh the rain! This year, however, it seems to come regularly every alternate day and

* Actually 53 the preceding December—and I nearly 27.

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I've been going by that. So, the fine days I do excursions, and picture galleries and churches in Florence the wet ones. It has worked out beautifully, so far."

"Pictures . . .", you repeated, "excursions—where?"

"San Gimignano, for one. What a wonderful place in itself! And, of course, the Benozzo Gozzolis there, those frescoes . . ."

"Benozzo Gozzolis!" The name of this painter set you off. "What on earth for?"

"Because I love his painting—that's all."

(I asked myself if you were playing at being a bit of a Philistine. Did I seem somewhat puzzling to you?)

". . . And Piero della Francesca, and Signorelli. These are my three favourite painters."

This was too much!

"What next?" you exclaimed, and offered me some more snuff.

(Were you playing at being a bit of a Philistine? A tweeded Scot, pooh-poohing at art? I was nonplussed now.)

"Isn't all that rather *Cinquecento*, my dear?" you asked suddenly.

It must have been an expression well-known to Osbert and Sachie, judging from the laugh that went up, which added to my bewilderment, although it made me laugh as much as them. What could it mean, used thus?

The noise and commotion had somewhat decreased, for the rabble of citizens engulfing macaroni was thinning out, and, as the wine-stains of decades came to light where dishes and plates had been removed, "More wine, more wine!" we shouted, making a good deal of noise on our own. Talking and drinking unstintedly as we all were, the conversation became very witty. That quick voice of yours—with what has so rightly been called its "staccato note", rounding off some sally, starting a new one or announcing some long and piercing diatribe; the occasional "Ha!" among your words. There must have been a good deal of joking between you and the Sitwells about Reggie Turner, and also about the "art-addicts" who periodically "infest" Florence

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(a great word of yours, that). Yet I think we returned lightly to the subject of Italian painting—I know I asked you to come and look at the Benozzo Gozzolis in the Palazzo Riccardi with me—which drew an immediate “Not on your life” from you—for what is Uccello doing in my memory at this point if not for such a reason?

“ . . . Not only Signorelli and the others, but Uccello too—a beauty in the Uffizi!”

“Uccello! Ha! . . . Do you know what *that* means in Italian?”

I didn’t, then. But learned from you later.

That was the way we met. A curious first conversation—if it can be called such.

How impressed I was with you—all the more so, perhaps, because, on account of all the mystifying, I had been vaguely expecting some kind of difficult or troubling apparition; nothing, at any rate, in the least straightforward. And lo! Here you were, with your “Douglas touch”, that blithe spring welling up spontaneous and bubbling out of such fine vitality and good humour. And the inventiveness, the beautiful racy English in which all these sallies and surprises were shot off! Yes, startling! I see us yet in that suffocating den, in roars of laughter for about two hours, flung out long before the fine form you were in had time fully to express itself.

As for “mysterious”—as far as I am concerned (and concerned I am paramountly and solely with what *I* know of you), I think this murky haze, this collection of nonsense that had accumulated, the rubbish voiced by those who did not know you, was mainly because you were triumphantly independent-minded and lived—or tried to—as you wanted to live. Many are those who can neither understand this kind of thing, nor forgive it when it succeeds. How impertinent is the mentality of “the herd”! Going your own way with considerable determination as well as decorum, you were indubitably “anti-herd”—and a great deal more than is implied in that descriptive negative. Sure

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of yourself, with all the humility, at the same time, of a great artist and savant, both of which you were in about equal proportion. Such is my (simplified) reading.

As for *Cinquecento*: "An expression of sublimated scorn applied to all those who, without being duly qualified, commonly express themselves in Art-jargon, emitting flatulent opinions and catchwords current in the Art-circles of Florence and elsewhere. Pretentious, snobbish, gassy amateurs, phoney collectors, or ponderous critics who are bores. All that is *précieux*." Such is my entry for the Douglas lexicon. How often your ears and patience must have been outraged at the Art "shop" gabbled by such visitors as were "simply unavoidable" here. I never ran on to you about any *Quattro* or *Cinque Cento*. And when, in later times, you would remonstrate that "a good luncheon is worth all the Benozzo Gozzolis in creation, so put off that preposterous expedition and let's have a good lunch instead", I would say "Let us meet, rather, for dinner"—and all was well! And yet these strictures (they soon ceased, even as a joke) against my seeing my favourite painters, seemed odd, coming as they did from you, you with all your love and knowledge of antiquity—you, living surrounded by your own exquisite Greek and Roman and Oriental objets d'art, of whose origins you had such thorough knowledge. Just one of many contradictions, this.

Of course, *Cinquecento* was pretty elastic and often applied to all sorts of situations and people so diverse that . . . no, I cannot encompass all of its meanings. It never popped out without startling. Intrinsically a note of exclamation. Now is that an adequate definition? Leave it alone! Don't pick it to bits!

I remembered next day you had said you would probably be in Capri in a month or so, and as my journey through several of the hill-towns of Tuscany culminated in the excruciating cold of Positano (now cut off by the violence of pre-spring deluges—a mere 300 yards had fallen off the road into the sea) I certainly hoped you might be found on "Nepenthe". At one go that night

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in Florence you had issued from the mystery-cloud. You were Norman Douglas, *sans retouches*—a man, obviously, of great personality of whom I think I was a little shy, someone I certainly hoped to know better, if things turned out that way.

Not the only person to feel “confoundedly sea-sick” on approaching Capri was your *South Wind* Bishop Heard. The little boat between Positano and the island looked like a broken clod-hopper and there were moments one felt it might even sink. Despite the smacking seas of the “Basin”, that Mediterranean you were so fond of, the approach grew beautiful. Of a dark-purple, mineral shade, with what grace the rocks of Capri came into focus, materialising into the island as it took on shape. The Piazza, however, disappointed me. Had I been expecting something more exotic? I think so. And also less sophisticated. After lunch I felt better about it. Something had happened . . . What else, indeed, but the brilliant, all-pervading entry of spring? This surely is one of the glories of Italy—the way Spring is suddenly there. I wandered along sea-paths, aware of the island-fragrance—yes, the moment one gets away from all those Piazza-flies.

And some time that afternoon you appeared, as genial as if we were old friends. You had come with Bryher, and presently several of us sat with you in one of the cafés in fits of laughter at your quips on the right manner of dealing with hovering bores. Well, one of them was a pretentious, rich woman, unremittingly fussy—she simply didn’t know a good thing when she found one, on that particular occasion: wine. She had fussed so much, asking you as a connoisseur what she should drink here on account of her head or her nerves or her liver—here with half the wines of creation to choose from—that you had murmured the name of one of Italy’s most aperient glories, and, greatly impressed, she had tried this mineral water—with most satisfactory results. She had not been seen for two days.

“One has to look out for *a good many* bores here!” you told me briskly, and I realised with admiration what a good technique you possessed. It was pretty difficult on Capri at that moment, for this was not the first time you had been back here since the

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publication of *South Wind*? They were all after you, all. Some contented themselves with laying eyes on you; a quiet nudge: "That's Douglas, there he is!". These were quite harmless. But others . . . You were quick at perceiving the approaching incubus—that would be somebody who had met you—and rose to your feet forthwith: "I'm off!" Maybe one would hardly call it "technique", this brusque decisiveness? It was most effective! Or if the approach were insufficiently perceived for escape in this manner, your inexhaustible inventiveness was at work on the spot, raising polite yet insurmountably complicated *quid pro quos* as to place and day and hour . . . No one was going to make you do something against your will; there was to be no lionising, ever.

I had many thoughts about you these few days, for you were fascinating to me. What was this odd reputation of yours? I could see nothing, absolutely nothing, to give rise to those puffed-out implications that you were in some way "dangerous". Dangerous at what, and to whom? "*South Wind's* iconoclastic author . . ." Ah! Such, in the early twenties, was perhaps a touchstone: "iconoclastic". Be it said in passing, I did not think the stress would fall just there in the first place from the lips of adult intellectuals—readers and critics—in France! There have been other "rugged individualists" in Letters! And then, "an erratic bohemian, his flights of wit oscillating between acerbity and unexpected bonhomie"—that sort of thing was another of the fancy touches.

Well, you had been "edited". It happens invariably to celebrities. Mis-edited, of course. Typically enough, all mention of your sound scientific knowledge, of your attainments in five living and two classical languages, was always left out!

As for the caricatural . . . your own evocation of D. H. Lawrence's "picture" is perfection. Now how did he limn you? As "a high-handed old swaggerer, somewhat unsteady on his legs". Dear, dear, dear . . . never once in nearly thirty years caught by me acting "high-handed", or "swaggering" or "unsteady". Too bad, too bad!

I realised that your personality was full of reserve, all the more

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complex for those shafts of wit and good-humoured banter—and rich, and genial; as kindly, too, as independent. You could be caustic in a startlingly spontaneous, a guillotine-like way. Excellent! And detached—very. A strong, masculine being, disgusted by everything sloppy, mawkish or sentimental, by confused thinking and muddled expression, by snobbery of any and every kind. Nor was there the slightest flavour of the professedly “literary man”. Of this I think *South Wind* itself is proof. Its wisdom and mother-wit are not clad in literary modes but perfectly straightforward; its many good ideas (some of them great truths) being put over in the most human kind of dialogue.

With *South Wind* in mind one looked around the Piazza and colourful it could be said to be. And yet—no. Whatever living models had served among all the shimmer and glow of your own creations must, surely, have belonged to another epoch, and that was gone. No encouragement came from you when the book was mentioned; a somewhat guarded, non-committal and detached expression lay on your face. The alchemy of today was no longer that of those times but at work now, on what? On *Together*, perhaps, which came out later this year?

“A good, long siesta after lunch,” you said, “but if that young painter with you really does want to draw me, he can come and do so in my hotel-room when I’m awake again at 4 o’clock.” And that is how Eugene MacCown came to make a curious pencil head—more of a rendering than a likeness, strangely foreshortened as it is, yet with a pretty line, evoking what might be called “the stone aspect” of you, for that too exists. Characteristic essentials—that Scottish look, that expressive decisiveness—are better recorded in photographs. Yet an artist should be allowed his own vision, and, with a feeling of gratitude that it escaped the destruction of war, I place it now with my other private Douglassiana.

We had several agreeable moments on the Piazza, you and Bryher (rather silent and thoughtful but obviously someone of

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first-rate mind), Eugene and I and several others. A few local characters would pass. Heavens! Who was this wonderful ancient with a large market-basket? One of those grand old Englishmen, *très milord*, in a tussore suit, the flowing vermillion tie setting off his long white locks deliciously waving in the breeze, a highly picturesque figure. Could it be that he was bare-foot? No; only very open sandals. *Un grand bohème*, something of an expatriot—he had lived here like this for years, you told me.

You never dressed like that—the very idea! Nothing could be more conventional than your rather thick clothes, heather-mixtures, generally dark in tone. “Crushed cockroach” was your own definition for one of those suits! Hard collar and waistcoat, braces, a tie of paisley pattern or an academic dark blue or green, a felt hat . . . You kept yourself very warm. When I went to you one dulcet spring afternoon to see if the drawing might be resumed, I found you in a fug of pipe-smoke, all windows shut, your feet rustling on a newspaper laid on the bed, just coming out of sleep to say something like “It isn’t summer yet, you know”.

Certainly we never had any talk alone at this time on Capri. Just try! But it seemed agreed that whenever I should come to Italy we must be sure to meet if I were anywhere near Florence where you had settled down to live.

The next occasion we met was in Bologna in the autumn of 1924—a brief but gay moment. Would you not come to Venice—I asked—where I was spending a fortnight? This evoked a rapid “Not on your life!”, for Venice was never sympathetic to you. It must be Florence or nothing. We split the difference, however, at Bologna. There is a slight mistake in Orioli’s *Adventures of a Bookseller*, for he has chronicled that merry evening with a wrong date. And he has it that I was staying with you, and that this meeting occurred two or three years later on. He was after the 1479 Brescia *Aesop*, an extremely rare book—and *that*, it seems, is what brought us all to Bologna.

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It may have seemed rather an odd trio that arrived by car, hot, dusty and in great need of refreshment which you joined us immediately in finding: Tristan Tzara, the Rumanian poet and founder of the *Dada* movement, Eugene MacCown and myself. Although Tzara knew very little of things English, you and he got on splendidly and this was probably the first occasion I listened to your remarkably good French. Could there but have been more time, time for *Dada* to be expounded . . . I mean, lightly touched on! To be sure, it was no longer in full flame as when it broke over all intellectual Europe immediately after the end of the war, having been birthed in Zürich in 1916. Tzara himself was now somewhat beyond it. I should have liked to hear you on the score of *Dada* philosophy, for there were many things in its attack on academic pomps that would have appealed to you. As we tucked into the *scampi* and all the other culinary riches, I thought what an agreeable subject this might be for one of Max Beerbohm's ineffable caricatures, this meeting of contrasts. For although Orioli shows that he had never heard of Tzara and *Dada*, the fact remained that Tzara was about the most universally known of cosmopolitan avant-garde intellectuals. Something like this, perhaps, as a caption to the drawing:

"Prandial first encounter between author of famous novel 'incorporating all known and several invented sins—South Wind' and founder of greatest modern iconoclastic movement—Dada."

Just as you were a storm-centre of legend, so Tzara was a sort of mystery-man of ethical and artistic revolution, pictured sometimes as a thunderous *ex-cathedra* giant, ominous, black-bearded, more full of blast than had ever been the hottest Futurist. How far from the truth! Neat, precise and sometimes very silent, Tzara sat gazing at you, taking in your personality. Who knows where we dined, but I remember yet the spread of dishes and wines and my pleasure at meeting Orioli—dear Pino—for the first time. There was an Italian child with you both, little Silvio, whose mother had asked you to take to an aunt nearby, and never had I seen a better-mannered small boy. He had ideas about me,

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though, according to Pino's book—he thought I would look like an asparagus with my clothes off; I seemed to him that long and slim.

Bologna was then already incredibly large and noisy. But come, you said, there are some things worth seeing! And so there are. Those two great towers, Asinella and Garisenda, all that are left of the 180 said to have existed here in the time of Dante—did you mean those? Well, they were "all right", you told us, and we could see them as we walked to what you had in mind—a certain statue. By now it was dark, and also moonlight; we were in luck. Well, here it was, this statue of a general, and merrily chatting we found ourselves at just the right spot . . . "Now look well and tell me what you see!" And as we laughed at the chance freak of something mightily emphasised in profile, you were reminded of other things to be seen in the sky and out popped a little imitation connected with crinolines and telescopes on a platform—(where *do* such quips originate?):

"What are you both looking at up there?"

"I see Uranus . . ."

"And I see Mars . . ."

No need to say "Think it out!" on this occasion. Maybe this was the first time that gay schoolboy aspect of you was vouchsafed me.

I wish I could remember the cause of our merriment during those hours in Bologna. What can we have talked about? There was that happy crony-ism between you and Pino which made, and kept, the right temperature. And certainly two or three genial limericks must have been tipped in. Is there something about excessive laughter that obliterates memory—or could it this time, perhaps, have been the wine? Several little snapshots are left . . .

It is now the fashion to exclaim about "The wonderful twenties". Why this apocryphal smarming over times that seemed, *then*, in no wise extraordinary? Can it be in contrast with the

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peculiarities of today? As for that "Between the Two Wars Period"—it makes me indignant to think of nearly twenty years of anyone's life being labelled in such a manner! I should like to hear *you* on "The twenties"! Why, in 1924 you must have had a mass of material already filed away for various subjects that were going into your *How about Europe?*—that lambast about "over-legislation" and "being governed to death" and how much else of the sort that came out in 1929! Those "twenties", in retrospect, seem not in the least amazing to me; nor can I think of any one word for them. "Normal", perhaps? But then, I seldom went to England and saw it already with a half-foreign eye. My home was France; Paris, in fact. And in Paris where *Surréalisme* had come into being, was a permanent state of *avant-gardisme* whose activities and creativeness were for ever stimulating. A good period in France, that. But you never came to Paris, it seems to me. It was in Italy that we met.

There were letters between us—and, my thoughts suddenly turning to those long-gone "twenties", what should arise but the memory of a note that came to me once in the Midlands. *What on earth*, you wanted to know, was I doing near Peterborough? The Midlands! God help me! Beets and swedes and turnips and mangle-wurzels—all that *ridiculous* agriculture—and not a feature, *not one*, in the whole landscape. A long, gently undulating line you had drawn across the page said "This is the Midlands" . . . *Of course* they are quite different to such exotic places as you were accustomed to—like Scylla and Charybdis, or the Pontine Marshes, or Olevano among the roaring nightingales, or Volterra with its young workers all covered in alabaster-dust, like so much make-up . . . What, compared to such, is the pastoral beauty of my darling River Nene? And don't we all remember how England always seemed much too *green* to you—on the whole rather like "being in a salad"?

Was it not in 1925 that John Rodker and I came to see you on our way through Florence? Such brief *en route* meetings during

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my several Italian journeys throughout the "twenties" had one dominant characteristic. And what else was this but a sense of *contrast*? Apart from the delight of being with you—that warm sunniness that spread over everything—the effect of issuing from certain bewildering and often neurotic moments into your aura of good round cheer, was startling. It began as soon as one approached your purlieu—that is to say, Cooks, Florence. The rapid note in advance would be immediately answered: "All right! Thursday, 7 o'clock!" These were most cordial stages, and it was *then* our friendship began. Alas that some of those moments with you and Pino, with or without others, cannot have gone down on record, unpruned, unedited. What should we think of them now? It seems to me that we should say "Encore! Bis! Bis!"—just that.

Heavens yes! And what about that evening when the talk, somehow, had got on to blackmail? What—said you like a pistol-shot—what to do with blackmailers . . . amateur or professional? Ha! *I* can tell you:

"The only way to treat such scoundrels is to be *absolutely ruthless*. Now, that wretched man, for instance . . . he was worried to death by a blackmailer, simply worried *to death*. He should have done what I told him to do . . . Simply wouldn't. Just paid up, again, and again, *and* again! I told him to try what I did . . . *Let them do their worst; let them threaten you with anything they fancy . . .*"

"Oh!" said someone eagerly, interrupting, "What *should* be done with blackmailers?"

"*Make them commit suicide!* Wear them down. Go for them instead of running away from them. Treat them as *I* have: *make them commit suicide in sheer despair*. That's what happened. And that's exactly what they deserve—every one of them!"

(It was all much longer and richer than this; and alas that no details were vouchsafed! It all ended, of course, with that final "Ha!" And it would have been a fine piece to place on record for all time.)

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You and Pino were admirable together, so gay and interesting, so much one the complement of the other. You took me once to see Reggie Turner in that grand villa of his, and I liked him, although all the little barbs of malice in the air went over my head, perceived but not properly comprehended!

What about giving me some good useful advice about Italy—I asked you on one of these journeys—you who knew so much about a great many different regions? To be sure, I was going merely to Rome, Naples, Pompei, Paestum—the beaten track. Still, any counsels? You said you had none to give—except about wine!

“Never drink *sealed, bottled* stuff like Chianti or Lacrima Cristi if you can help it. Drink wine out of the flask, always—which is pure and generally good. And have that weighed, if it’s the two-litre one.”

“*Weighed?*”

“Certainly, weighed. Before and after—if you’ve left any. Because, if it’s in one of those big flasks you can’t see how much there is in it at the start or finish, on account of the straw—like that swing-flask on the table. They will take advantage of that and charge you for the whole thing, unless you have it weighed. They don’t like your telling them to do that, of course! But they’ll respect you all the more!”

I saw you do this many a time, and once the man was caught out. Oh how you went up in his estimation! You *knew*.

There was also this interesting fact about wine:

“Although from the same vineyard”, you said, “which needn’t be a large one either, it can sometimes taste quite different. That’s because the nature of the soil varies—just a few yards can make the difference. The vine is the same, but some parts of the soil contain more stones or more sand, for instance, than others. Hence the difference in the taste of the wine.”

This was the year (1925) that you began to publish your own books in Florence in those handsome, signed, limited editions

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for subscribers. How well that arduous and enterprising idea turned out, and many a comment of yours do I remember, the while, about the swindling ways of publishers! Now, with all the trouble of attending to everything yourself, at least the profits were respectable.

Experiments, the first of these books, had gone off well. But Lord, you groaned, the number of printing-errors . . . appalling! Well, these original editions might be all the more valuable one day . . . And yet I could see how vexing to you were the misprints. No one was a more conscientious worker; added to epicurean taste and knowledge was the scrupulousness of an artist, the respect due to work *well* done. No small matter in this case! What, with Italian printers who knew not *a word* of English?

The previous year you had published that brilliant defence of the American journalist who committed suicide, *D. H. Lawrence and Maurice Magnus—A Plea for Better Manners*, and it sold so well, this apt and vigorous reply to Lawrence's attack on Magnus, that there were two other editions. And small wonder. For there is far more in this long pamphlet than the refutation of Lawrence's misrepresentations; there is the examination of his singular way of turning various friends and acquaintances into literary "capital"—an analysis and a condemnation of the whole school of novelists who indulge in this kind of thing. And the whole affair was one of the literary "causes célèbres" of its time.

A very considerable amount of work, those editions: the superintending of the printing, the struggles with the binding every time before the 400 or 500 copies of each book—excellent in lay-out and bound in pleasing Italian paper-boards—lay before you, ready to be signed, packed, registered—some of them inscribed—by you, and by you, as a rule, single-handed. Things like this, in my copy of *How about Europe?*:

"To darling Nancy, from Norman, 23 Nov. 1929.

68 parcels off this morning. Writing soon. Love. N."

As methodical as could be—luckily, for there was also all the

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billing, correspondence and keeping of accounts. Dates of letters sent and received entered into little note-books; a carefully established list of subscribers in various countries who sometimes out-numbered the editions. A collector's author! You had turned yourself into that, and far more satisfactory it was, you told me time and again, than the ordinary commercial way. But that came later as well, when publishers bought the rights after the Florentine editions were sold out. It paid!

What else were you doing those mid-twenties? There were journeys in Calabria and other Italian regions, in Austria and the Tyrol,—even one to Nairobi—and when you went to Rome you would sometimes stay in his rooms on top of the Tarpeian Rock with my cousin Victor Cunard.

Aragon and I were in Florence for a few days in October 1926, not long before the thirteenth unsuccessful attempt on Mussolini's life. The evolution of Fascism was visible—even in Venice where, somehow, it always seemed less noticeable. However, this month students there roared angrily along the streets and I came in for a share of this, for my rust-coloured mackintosh turned blood-red when it rained; it rained every day, and so . . . Earlier journeys in Italy had left certain memories—an excited man racing at me through a Roman street at night, having spied small red trimmings on my dark blue jacket; that old Neapolitan cabman who had whipped up his horse and left me stranded, recognising, quite correctly, certain sounds as the advance of a group of Blackshirts. What did *you* feel about this hysteria? Would you ever talk about Fascism? No! Simply not to be drawn! This was indeed disappointing to many of us who would have liked a good, long assessment from you, or even some stray remarks! *Not to be drawn*. As if there were some mute "Catch me!" at any suggestion of the subject.

But now one day you said to me suddenly—and the matter was so much in my mind that I thought 'Ah, here it comes, now Norman is going to make some kind of comment'—

"Have you noticed anything different about Florence this time?"

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Several things were different, yes. Did you mean—I asked—things like that procession of children, some of them only four or five years old, tagging on after the older boys, led by what looked like a Field Marshal all plastered with medals and red and black tabs and pompons bobbing about, as he marched, marched, marched in his ostentatious big boots, turning round to wave instructions with his great beastly white gloves to those wretched children in militarised boy-scout uniforms—the whole long column in struggling step along the Arno at eight in the morning, heralded by blaring brass and crashing cymbals that brought Aragon and myself racing to the window, roused from sleep by all of this cacophony? Did you mean the evolution of such things—what were these militarised children anyway?

“Preposterous! No, I don’t mean *Balillas*. I mean *beggars*. Haven’t you noticed there aren’t as many beggars about as there used to be? You can walk now without being pestered to death!”

“And is that attributable to Mussolini, as it’s said to be?”

“Not on your life, ha! It’s because they’re all still in their villas on the hills.”

“Norman, Norman . . . !”

“Take it or leave it, my dear. *I know*. Some of them are millionaires; they have country-places which they go to in summer. I wish I had what they make! ‘*Povero vecchio*’ indeed . . .”

You yourself had, however, contributed to the making of such “millionaires”. I see us yet, several of us, strolling along in Florence; your mind is on proof-reading and the like, when you suddenly stop, saying “Wait a minute, I *am* going to give this one something.” There must have been many old friends among these “*poveri vecchi*”.

Like Tzara, Aragon was much impressed by you. What beautiful French, and what a tremendous personality! Neither had ever met such a particular brand of old wine before—of sheer, elemental sun-warmth. And such an easy, spontaneous manner! Surely England nowadays . . .

“But he is not representative of England!” I cried—“any-

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thing but! And he has been a happy expatriate for a great number of years already. No; what you see is most individual. Nor is Norman entirely Scottish, either. He is himself plus continentalism, and this has developed and blossomed throughout his long years in Italy. The way he writes of this country! Such observations are expert psychology. As for his knowledge of the language . . . How about those 'Oaths of Florentine Cabmen', of which he has just told me enough have been collected by him to fill two volumes?"

It was a pity they were not in print, although who could fully savour their value save an Italian, well-versed in folk-lore—or someone with your knowledge of the tongue? Of the latter there cannot have been at any time so very many!

Even now, it seems to me, we never had a meal or a talk alone, for the gay lunches and dinners in all the clatter of those Florentine *trattorie* were like small impromptu parties. No, never alone. Not even the day you came over with William Walton and Basil Leng to lunch with me and Aragon at Grimaud in the South of France next spring—a most pleasant day, properly celebrated, ending with some photographs which include almost my favourite. For here we are, you and I, smartly walking away from the others, your arm around my waist and mine around your shoulder. Not by it alone has the thought at times been evoked: "Should I perhaps have been in love with you, if ages . . . if circumstances . . . Should I, years ago, have been "one of yours" and you "one of mine"? I can come to no conclusion about this, to none whatever!

Now with the summer of 1928 begins a new period when we had a good deal more to do with each other, and this comes under the sign of "Printing and Publishing".

Your request that I should make you *an exact copy* of the Report you had written for the Foreign Office in 1895, on the Pumice Stone Industry of the Lipari Islands (long-since out of print) came just after I had learned to set type by hand. Words by you and by

Letter to Norman

George Moore were the illustrious sponsors of my initiation into the craft of hand-printing.

How often we have talked of the house I had just bought then in Normandy, known as "Le Puits Carré", near the village of La Chapelle-Réanville, in lush, smiling country—peopled with some extremely disagreeable villagers, as became clear much later on. No sooner was the nightmare ended of transforming the primitive cottage into a house than I felt I should begin to learn printing—an old wish already, that Virginia and Leonard Woolf had tried to dissuade me from: "Your hands will never be free of printing-ink!" Such was no worry to me at any moment. The incubus was the printer. But he was also an extremely *rara avis* these times; few were those who combined knowledge of setting with the ability and willingness to work such an obsolete—though beautiful—old hand-press as was my Belgian Mathieu, bought from William Bird who had used it as his "Three Mountains Press" in Paris. Technical difficulties without the efficient kindness of Bird would have been appalling; it was he who came and directed the installation, he who found and sent me the rare printer.

On arrival Monsieur Lévy informed me that he was "an anarchist" and I could have wished him one still for, surely, he was happier then? His nature (presumably now reft of the brotherly ideals implicit in Anarchism) was sour and peckish, his joy lay in trying to make others feel small. Nothing pleased him better than to detect one's lassitude at the end of a long day, the difficulties experienced with the ways of paper. The ways of type were friendly to me, and learning how to handle it so swift and pleasant as to bring a heavy scowl to Monsieur Lévy's face. He could not get over the speed with which both Aragon and myself had grasped the right position of the printing-stick, hardly ever dropped a line and never once a whole page while tying it up—the security we seemed to feel in all matters of taste—the manner in which we waived many set rules and principles. The Mathieu was all too often on Monsieur Lévy's side; a more difficult Press to work in all its hoary inexactitude cannot ever have existed.



Walking away under the olives



N.D. in 1890



William Walton, the author, N.D. and Louis Aragon at Grimaud,
Alpes Maritimes

Earlier Memories

What was to be printed first of all? George Moore had said that I must begin with something of his! The honour of it apart, that sort of thing had never been my idea, for what I wanted to do was contemporary poetry. However, the universal chorus of "You won't get far with *that!*" had had its effect. And so, torn between making the Press pay for itself, if possible, and my own desire to publish modern poetry that I thought good, it turned out that George Moore was the first on my list. A *great* honour, yes; a darling story as well. But did he realise the very small scale of my venture, my utter lack of knowledge as yet? "A reprint, a revised version of the story of *Peronnik the Fool*" (some sixty pages of beautiful prose) was his reply.

For some reason or other *Peronnik* did not arrive at once . . . Yet no! I had already set and printed the first eight pages (the last four of them unaided and single-handed, in a heat-wave) when your "Pumice" came along, a hasty customer brooking no delay—you wrote—enclosing the grim-looking, original eight-page F.O. Report written while in the Diplomatic Service at the end of last century:

"I want 80 copies of this at once—if you can do them."

Informative and interesting in its straightforward way, my heart sank as I gazed at the "Report on the Pumice Stone Industry of the Lipari Islands" which had to be copied as exactly as possible. It would have to go in 11 pt., with those pesky little notes in 9 pt., and I disliked the one—small—and the other—microscopic—so little is there to show at the end of hours and hours of hand-setting. Gone the new-found delight of handling that noble 16 pt. Caslon Old Face which suits poetry so well! I had been experimenting with it already. I could not have undertaken those *pensum*-like eight pages of Pumice for anyone but you, no! The trouble they gave us in those early days of my HOURS PRESS no one will ever know!

Monsieur Lévy was in raptures, for here was something grim and businesslike. Now my silly enthusiasm would collapse! I was glad of his presence, for the technical difficulties and the proper Report-like look we strove to reproduce would have been far

Letter to Norman

beyond me. We turned out a beautiful copy—two weeks work in all, I think—and off went “the edition” to you in Florence. Did you want it for collectors of your work? You were pleased, and I wish I still had your letter of thanks and praise. But even you, accustomed as you were to standing over Italian printers struggling with English, must have been unaware of such niceties as the exact amount of pressure—for instance—that has to be laboriously sought and found on a very old Hand-Press frequently more temperamental than oneself!

And what were you doing at this time? Two more of those beautiful editions of yours had come out in 1927, *Birds and Beasts of the Greek Anthology* and *In the Beginning*. From first to last, these Florentine issues numbered nine—six published by you and three by Orioli. Generously you sent me each book, inscribed. How often I thought “Alas that we cannot be printing and publishing together”.

Were we perhaps writing to each other already about my doing a book of yours? Then or soon after. The HOURS PRESS developed rapidly, although it was not till next year that I saw how the business-side of it engulfed more and more of the time I wanted to spend with my 16 pt. Caslon type and Haut Vidalon paper, the Press and the inking-table. *Peronnik*, battling through heat-waves in primitive conditions was nearly half-done when Monsieur Levy took off that smock of his for his grim summer holiday. Mine was to be anything but grim. It was, in fact, to be Venice—and what a season that turned out to be. And then? Why then I came to you in Florence, actually to stay with you—an invitation, I think, not extended to so very many.

And a most agreeable time it was under your roof at 14 Lungarno delle Grazie above Orioli's apartment overlooking the Arno, those five or six days when I would wake to what seemed a vista of open doorways; a curtain which could be pulled over one or two gave the darling place a slightly Roman aspect.

“Never tell anyone—mind you—*anyone*, this address!” you had said years before, and I had borne this in mind so well that I could not remember it myself, for I always wrote you to Cooks.

Earlier Memories

All I could rely on to find you was a small touch of mauve—a piece of sham marble round a bell just inside the street door, remembered from some previous occasion.

Not more than 7 a.m. could it have been when I managed to rediscover this, shouting my name after ringing at your flat. A rasping sound came from within and the door was flung open, revealing you, already dressed, very businesslike and even rather testy:

“Oh, it’s you, is it? I thought it was my laundry . . . I’ve been up for hours. Why on earth didn’t you wire me? Come in, my dear.”

My telegram was one that reaches its destination many hours after oneself, a frequent Italian custom.

This was the time I got to know Pino a good deal better and many were the meals and talks and strolls the three of us had. We would end by being alone, you and I, at the end of the evening. Admirable in that sitting-room were those rare pieces of alabaster and jade, the great yellow marble tortoise you had dug up yourself in your garden near Baia—how many years ago—and the lapis lazuli dagger-handle from Persia, and the ancient bowls and plaques, the bits of bas-relief and the statuettes—all of the finest quality, assembled by you in that long-ago you never said a word about. And the curiously *désinvolte* way you had when I told you my admiration: “Oh yes—that’s a good piece, ye-es . . . I wonder where all the others are now?”

Gone, disappeared, volatilised—along with the rare stones and fossils, the collections of books, prints, maps and engravings, the other things pertaining to Capri and Sorrento—gone. In what avatars, what violent changes in your life that I knew naught of and that lay silently under this meditative and rather wistful “I wonder where all the others are now?” The very phrase is one for Janus in all his duality astride of the sad and the gay . . . it covers the whole of life and passing time . . .

One evening you asked me about Venice. Now, what had that been like? I was longing to tell you, yet somewhat uncertain as to how much sympathy would be evoked by such things as

Letter to Norman

“crises in the emotions”, such matters as a rule enjoying short shrift with you! In all, it seemed to me what I thought you might call “a regular bumper crop”.

Well, why not tell Norman everything—I thought—this once? Nearly everything . . . It had been the hell of a time in many ways—gay and mad, fantastic and ominous, and horribly dramatic too, for there was nearly a sharp physical tragedy. How would you react to the outpouring of so full a cornucopia?

I described all the people I thought would interest you—the joy of some, the bane of others; the petty intrigues and funny scandals; balls, fancy-dress galas and festivities—the whole hectic spin of Venice in August and September during the twenties, all the more exotic on account of its cosmopolitanism. I told you how much I liked the calmer hours when I would row with my philosophical gondolier, Angelo Trevisan, and how I loved pushing my oar in rhythm with his in a *sandalo*; of how much I learned from him about the difficult times of such Venetians as have to make enough money out of seasonal business and summer flummery to live on for the rest of the year. I told you of Augustina, an endearing, love-crossed maid, who fell on her knees embracing mine, begging me, weeping, to take her out of her unhappiness in Italy, where, she said, she would find no work after I had gone . . . And of Asterio Clerici, that dizzy, good-looking waiter, the story of whom is absolutely unprintable. Although it began in a would-be amorous manner, I felt sure it was hinged to the fear of unemployment and his dislike of the Fascist regime. He too had wanted me to take him out of Italy. Here you interrupted:

“Ha! Asterio Clerici—what do you expect with a name like that?”

“What a cryptic remark, Norman! Would that name account for such extraordinarily daring behaviour in public?”

“Lots of things that would seem extraordinary elsewhere are quite common in Italy. Young people often get excited and lose their heads. It’s the *excitement* they like. And not only young people . . . Go on, go on. Tell me everything!”

Earlier Memories

Well, it had all been spectacular for several weeks—that blazing Lido strewn with society stars in glittering jewels and make-up—that brilliance of Grand Canal Barge-Parties—those spontaneous dawn-revels after dancing in some of the rather sinister new night-bars. A time came when everyone thought everyone else “crazy”—although Eddie Knoblock, despite my doubts, told me he thought *I* was the only sane person in Venice—an agreeable compliment from a most intelligent man! I told you how a great friend of mine had nearly committed suicide; it was only avoided at the last moment and all of that had been ghastly. And then, with the rains, had come the withdrawal of the great tide of people. And one night—well, this was something entirely new to me:

My cousin Edward Cunard and I had gone to sup and dance in the Hotel Luna and here we met some people so different to all I had ever known that they seemed as strange to me as beings from another planet. They were Afro-Americans, coloured musicians, and they played in that “out of this world” manner which, in ordinary English, would have to be translated, I suppose, by “ineffable”. Such Jazz and such Swing and such improvisations! And all new to me in style! Well, so ravishing was it all that when they stepped from the band-stand at the end of their last number we rose to our feet with one accord and asked them to sit down and have a drink with us. The charm, beauty and elegance of these people—I told you—their art, their manners, the way they talked with us—these “Eddie South’s Alabamians”, as they were commercially called! *Enchanting* people, all four, whom we went to hear again and again and often talked with—Eddie, “the dark angel of the violin”, Mike the guitarist, Henry at the piano and Romie at the drums . . . Bless them all . . .

“Now here is some curious English, Norman. Might it be Shakespearian? Listen well. You know in how rare a manner certain Americans express themselves. It seems that American Coloured talk has a parallel richness and is often stranger yet! One of these ‘Alabamians’ is known as Banjo Mike—from

Letter to Norman

Chicago. As attractive as a panther and rather like one—young, with a light brown skin, rippling blue-black hair. He has innate courtesy, beautiful clothes, and is practically illiterate, playing excellently by ear . . . There he was one day in the street and I said, ‘How are you, Mike?’ To which he replied with his charming smile: ‘Spunk’s pretty high this morning!’ Might that be old English—when ‘spunk’ was ‘courage’?”

“And then, Henry—another man of great good looks, who is partly Red Indian. Henry tells me: ‘Mike is an angle-man’. Do you see what *that* means? Would it be something in the nature of playing off one person against another?”

But you had no ideas as to the possible origin or meaning of these two gems.

“Go on, go on—*tell me everything!*”

Well, at the end I gave a little fancy-dress dance, which had some picturesque touches, silhouetted against the windows open on to the Zattere. Here, at one moment, was an old nobleman, dressed like a Mandarin, down on his knees, most imprudently beseeching the favours, then and there, of . . . And that figure of fantasy, rather like a Velasquez dwarf, who despite all his charm and wealth (or because of them) had had scandals all over Europe, who now ran hither and yon in consternation at having mislaid his little jewelled box and, oh dear, it contained cocaine! And right in the middle of the party, my gondolier, who—as he pointed out—was not a young man nor even of the dashing kind, taking me aside to confide his amazement at being so amiably solicited: “I could have understood had it been my nephew . . . but, *me?*” No harm, indeed, no harm—he laughed kind-heartedly—but Lord, how odd was the behaviour of some foreigners in Venice . . . At six or so in the morning the last to leave were three of the “Alabamians”, and delectable was this view of them from above, going away in that bright Venetian sunlight with certain golden and other raven-haired friends of European blood . . . A new element had come into my life, suddenly. It was

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certainly too soon to pronounce oneself concerning its importance—one should never try to prise open the bud of the future. No! I was not going into *that* with you. And so, this was about all—except that, being very short of sleep and somewhat upwrought, I felt I was suffering from “extreme nervous exhaustion”.

There was a considerable silence, and then you grunted, actually grunted one short remark:

“It all sounds *like a regular good job-lot* to me.”

Florence was very different; nothing exotic here! I went to look again at my favourite paintings and you took me to see Emilio, who was working in a printery and with whom I tried to have a sustained conversation in Italian about type-setting. Emilio was already known to me, and looking back now it does seem that he was by far the nicest of all the young Italians you had befriended, instructed and materially helped to get a good start in life. He was devoted, perfectly devoted, and I could feel how profoundly he appreciated you, having been with you to help in the flat since he was twelve. And what was he now? About seventeen, I think. I loved Emilio; his instinctive warmth and generosity of nature—not a trace about him of that odious “on the make”, that rapacity so common in Italy. Emilio loved you sincerely and profoundly.

Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had just come out, privately published by Orioli, and, now reading it eagerly, I felt angry with it. What were your comments on this curiously disagreeable novel? I don't remember your thinking highly of it; quite possibly you had more to say about the innumerable printers' errors than concerning its psychology. You must have said something . . . But it was remarkable how you could just be silent, dismissive in *that* manner of things that bored you! And at this time too, despite the fact that they were soon to appear, there was no talk whatever about those *Limericks*, no pre-view and no advance-peep. Let them issue on their own bright startling wings!

Letter to Norman

That Christmas, now back at the Press with Monsieur Lévy, I received my copy from you, aptly inscribed.

Late autumn lay grimly over Normandy on my return, and the cold and gloom of dripping, and next of freezing country would have been unendurable but for the printing-work that went on day after day in grim tête-à-tête—with the talk running something like this:

“Il faut aligner sur 25!” “Non! C’est un ‘justif’ de 30 qu’il faut; trois cicéros de douze par ici, quatre blancs par là”—and more technical jargon of this kind.

My printing was learned in French, and it pleased me to think of you having the same sort of conversations with your printers in Italian, but there would be smiles all round, *there*, I reflected, whereas here . . .

After three months it became insufferable, and I persuaded Henry to leave Eddie South’s “Alabamians” in Paris, if only for a time, and come and work for the HOURS PRESS. We had become very good friends after I left you in Florence and I was intensely interested—amazed too—at what I learned from him about the life of the American Negro. As you saw later, Henry became a great turning-point in my own. My feeling for things African had begun years ago with sculpture, and something of these anonymous old statues had now, it seemed, materialised in the personality of a man partly of that race. My sympathy with the Afro-American had, obviously, begun with music. At present something of both was in the house and part of it.

The adaptability of the American Negro! Henry, always a thoughtful, serious-minded man (although on occasion in rhapsodically rollicking mood) was sick to death of night hours, of all the drinks sent to him at his piano, of the fatigue attendant on the adulation of Montmartre and those interminable “crap-games” at dawn he and the other coloured musicians would be playing in the “Flea-Pit”, too weary to go home and sleep. I got him away from all of that and we hired a piano for Réanville.

Earlier Memories

Now he and Monsieur Lévy and I pulled the Press together on printing-day. Henry also did billing and circulars and parcels, laughing at the strange hierarchy of English titles as they have to be written for the post. And he drove the car too; he was indispensable. Thus Henry became part of THE HOURS.

Encouragement there was. George Moore's *Peronnik* appeared and sold out immediately. My publishing list was getting known in England, reviews and criticisms started to come in. Next we did Alvaro Guevara's strange Giotto-like poem *St George at Silene*; Richard Aldington's fine long poem *The Eaten Heart*; Aragon's fantastically good translation of *The Hunting of the Snark*. In view was Arthur Symons *Mes Souvenirs*, some remarkable pages of his recollections of Verlaine.

And of course it was in Florence while I was with you that we had decided on my publishing your delicious *One Day, belles-lettres* about Greece. There would be two editions, one signed, each with two photographs of the author and that good picture you had taken of the Temple of Bassae.

That winter, apart from the gladdening arrival of Henry, and a press-photographer who came and took some doleful pictures of Monsieur Lévy and myself around the old Mathieu, the only other presence from the outside world was your friend John Mavrogordato—a dreadful day for him.

It seems to me that he arrived unannounced on some business of yours. Paris was quite near, but such was the cold of that blustering February that Réanville must have seemed strangely remote. It fell out that the pulling-spell was on that very day and could not be interrupted. Would he understand? Of course! And it interested him, he said, to see how the thing worked. After a rather hasty lunch we had to return to work. Would not Mavro prefer to sit in a warm room till it were time for his train? An example of kindly patience, he sat, however, on whatever could be found in the draughty printery, while the concentration of the three of us—all inking, pulling the lever and replacing the sheets—was perforce such that only the most desultory words could be exchanged. I was much distressed at the chance

Letter to Norman

conjunction of Mavro and printing-day. After a while the car took him to the station, managed to make him miss the train, and Mavro was soon back with us. By now we had got through two-thirds of the work; we were, figuratively, steaming—back-broken, grimly silent, unable to stop. I can see that courteous friend of yours yet, muffled in his overcoat, patiently turning over and over in his hands what we were printing. There was not much to read, for it was merely the title-page of Guevara's *St George* . . .

To do *One Day*—500 copies in all—we should need another technique, for it was far too long to set by hand. The signed edition of 200, bound in plain scarlet leather (Royal Octavo) with your signature as the title in gold, and the end-papers reproducing your photograph of Bassae with Edward Hutton (to whom this book is dedicated) in the foreground, must be impeccable. So must the other, in puce-coloured boards, and also on fine paper—300 copies. It would have to be done in monotype and that would come from Paris. Henry was much alarmed at the weight of the lead as he drove back with the load; it had, he thought, damaged the springs of the car.

The advance-orders were impressive; that list of possible buyers you had made out for me must have helped a great deal, yet the booksellers seemed even more eager. We ended, I remember, in another heat-wave—nearly five hundred copies had to be packed and registered off in two or three days. There was a very ugly row in one Paris post-office—and I marvelled that such was not the case in the several we went to. In the end, a few slightly scratched or imperfect copies remained. That is how there came to be *any at all* at Réanville all those years later; these are the copies you refer to in *Late Harvest*.

Some particularity seemed to attend the publication of each of the HOURS PRESS books, in several cases it was one form or another of binding trouble. Characteristic of yours was simply the amount of hard work that went into the handsome little volume—a durable one, I see, from all points of view.

As I printed, and corresponded with buyers and circularised and did accounts and wrote endless business-letters, working

Earlier Memories

sometimes up to sixteen hours a day, I often thought you were an ideal author, a model of such—from a publisher's point of view. No finicky fussings, no hypersensitiveness about the "gutter" and things of that kind; no queries at all. Complete confidence, in short, in what I was going to turn out.

And then, you helped me with some very sagacious advice at the start! Just *how* iconoclastic it is among all the established precepts of bookselling I am not sure to this day, but it certainly worked, and not only where *One Day* was concerned:

"Never give more than ten per cent discount to booksellers!"

"But . . ."

"*Ten per cent*. The booksellers will hate that, of course, but you'll see! With authors like those you've got . . . They'll be glad to buy your books. Then they can put some copies away for a while and sell them for double the price, ha!"

And so it was: ten per cent. When I had learned more about publishing, I was amazed. On the whole, The HOURS PRESS owed its success to three things—apart from the admirable Mr Gray, the book-traveller, a great admirer of yours, who did remarkably well by me: Many of its authors were famous and sought after. Next, interminable hard work ("driven work", Henry used to call it). And lastly, ignorance of how publishing is run.

Yes, ignorance. Of what "overheads" meant and things of that sort. Ignorance of what I should like to call "abstract" expenses—indefinite things floating about in space that could not be put down neatly in that big black book in the way I had evolved for clarity and simplicity, thus:

"Printer's time, light, heat, paper, binding, circularising, postage, correspondence, etc. Total of production—cost: XXX." Facing this on the opposite page were the incoming moneys on that particular book. As soon as the entire costs of production had been covered (and they were, it seems to me, rather moderate on account of one's own hard work) the author was due—and received—33 per cent of all the profits on his book—my own time not being counted *as such* throughout. Does that seem a dishonest way of publishing?

Letter to Norman

In the Rue Guénégaud, Paris, when I moved THE HOURS to that tiny ground-floor (once graced by the visit of James Joyce and of several other celebrities) a small percentage of rent went on to the expense sheet. Nor you, nor George Moore, nor Arthur Symons, nor Robert Graves, nor Roy Campbell, nor any of my other authors had the slightest complaint about this financial arrangement. The two last received about Sixty Pounds each for some twenty pages of poems—good poems, well produced, beautifully bound—in those days Poetry was appreciated! And what did *we* work out at over *One Day*? Was it not something in the nature of Three Hundred Pounds to you as author of those fifty-five happily-written pages ending with a few epigrams of your own in the Greek manner?

About this time, at the end of 1929, you dedicated *Nerinda* to me, finely produced by Orioli in Florence, a haunting story of madness, “the disintegration of a personality”, and the pages you added later are illuminating on the score of your precision, and respect for truth. Not quite sure whether or no you had correctly traced the course of this kind of insanity, what did you do but go to Sir Henry Maudsley, the great alienist, who, after reading your pages, wrote that your description was perfectly in keeping.

A third book of yours to come out this year is one of my favourites, that startling *ex cathedra*, *How about Europe?*, to my mind one of the best titles ever put on paper. Not the view of the American publisher, however, who changed it to that sententious *Goodbye to Western Culture!* This, however, must have afforded a pleasurable surprise to the American reader. Far from some ponderous lament on our decay, what else should come but a peppery lambast against all kinds of crazy things in legislation, attacks on the treatment of child-delinquents, a spirited showing-up of the innumerable abuses of our times—all done with such a sweep and flourish that, to mix my metaphors, it has an overpowering and salutary tang of raw ginger. *A dynamic work indeed.*

This was a busy year for you in book production, and there was a journey too with Pino in Calabria. I seem to remember you

Earlier Memories

briefly in Paris. Was it not then I was so much edified at hearing you talk to Aleister Crowley on the phone?

"Get me the old rascal. What's he up to now? Does he still wear that ridiculous kilt?"

Yes! I told you I had seen him not so long ago dressed in this manner in some Montmartre night-club at 2 a.m. And there was that story about him . . . Oh!—just two little kittens that had got under his kilt and were playing some mysterious kind of pat-ball there . . .

"Hullo you old b . . .", you gurgled at him down the phone, "is that you? Haven't seen you for a long time. How about a drink?"

Whatever he said, and it was lengthy, evoked a good deal of chuckling on your part. Now why did this little conversation—one half of it witnessed—make me think of two beings that were "perfectly indestructible" (the expression was one of yours in another context) talking to each other on an inter-planetary phone?

You said you had known Crowley pretty well . . . those lurid Italian years of his. Well, whatever he had or had not done, there was a good deal to be said for him. He had a *mind*.

All of next year goes under the head of "Printing" here, and I do not see us together at all until the end of it. A piquant enough memory arises at this point and in considerable detail . . .

Yes, late autumn 1930. You must have been in Paris at least a month; there would not have been time, otherwise, for things to go so far! And is this not the time Harold Acton narrates with such *brio* in his *Memoirs of an Aesthete*: Uncle Norman in Paris, faced, at one horrible moment, with one of Salvador Dali's paintings—a large slab of liver bleeding on a piano, flanked by a wild horse and a dead donkey, or the like?

Now why "Uncle" Norman?—I asked myself when I read this fascinating book. Is this not gilding the lily? Norman—surely there is but one! And then I remembered you yourself started the habit and even sometimes signed this way.

Letter to Norman

The Press was running, not, as Harold has it, "by fits and starts", but with conscientious regularity, for it turned out work fairly in the allotted time. And as for that bed you both saw me in sometimes, always littered with papers and often surrounded with people—a great deal of the correspondence, proof-reading and accounts was done there, and work never seemed to stop. Harold's descriptions of yourself and myself in this book have made me laugh unrestrainedly; *very* nice things too he has to say concerning us both. Moreover, there are some acute thoughts about you and Pino in Florence a few years later. Fine artist that he is, Acton has understood you remarkably well—better, indeed, than most. And the quality of his heart and mind are evident in the very quality of his beautiful pages on China—to which it was *you* who encouraged him—how rightly—to go!

At last a time had come when it seemed I might close the Press, take on no fresh work and go away for a little. I was beginning to think about Africa. Would Henry also not like to see the land of some of his ancestors? Enthusiastically received by him, the idea was beginning to swing like a pendulum—positive-negative—all affirmative of an evening when many of us, French, English, American and Coloured poets, writers, artists or musicians—would be together in some café (your nice friend Walter Lowenfels, the American poet whom I had published, was often one). Everything then seemed possible! The negative swing came in the morning when it did all appear rather difficult. What of the cost, the time, the general span of such a journey?

Well, there you were now in Paris telling me you didn't know *what* you wanted to do next, that you felt like travel. There you were, getting on magnificently with Henry, who, like so many other friends of mine in different spheres, was fascinated by you. Africa! Not yet in my conscious mind was the plan to make that big book about Africans and other Negroes which later became my *Negro Anthology*. Yet the subject was there in bud—thanks to what I had absorbed from Henry's vivid and descriptive accounts

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of Afro-America—all of it latent, incubating quietly and soon about to stir. There was also African sculpture, which, as you knew, I liked immensely and had learned a little about. Could I not learn a good deal in Africa of the Africans themselves, they in their endless diversity? And again, what of their music? As a pianist and composer, Henry could do good work in that field and bring back something as yet unknown, which later might be published by THE HOURS?

What about you—would *you* like to go with us?

“Now Norman, you keep on telling me you don’t know what to do next—which is surprising. How about Africa? Shall the three of us go?

“Anything you say, my dear. I’ll go anywhere.”

That is how it began.

I took you at your word. In a way, it seemed rather a curious trio, you, Henry and I. And, in another way, what could be more natural?

“Where shall we go? The Gold Coast sounds wonderful. Or Nigeria? Yes, Nigeria, Benin City for one. I would love to see whatever is left of that. The finest things of all come from . . .”

“Anywhere you say *except* Nigeria. Because it’s British, and there will be the Colour Bar, and it will be damned awkward on account of Henry being coloured.”

You looked rather glum, adding quickly:

“The more races, *and* peoples, *and* ages, *and* sexes there are together the better *I* like it. But that’s not the way the British official mind works! We should have trouble—maybe serious trouble—if we went to Nigeria with an American black man!”

“Oh how disgraceful! The imbecility of it! All the more reason, indeed, for going. I feel sure there is nothing *illegal* in this . . .”

(Whenever I hear the word “official” I think of legality.)

You remained silent.

“Now, come, Norman, why shouldn’t two British citizens be travelling with an American citizen of Colour? We should even

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be on a sort of "mission", collecting data and music—at least, Henry and I would be, and you would doubtless find all sorts of wonderful inspirations. What has "the official mind" to do here? It can't be against the law!"

"*You can get around laws—but you can't get around customs!*"

"Well—all right. What about Dahomey—French?"

"Anywhere you say, my dear. Just let me know when you think of starting and I'll go with you."

We got no further that day. Nor, maybe, for several days. Meanwhile, what did Henry think? *Did* you want to go or not? Henry laughed a good deal, then in all the serenity of his great smile replied "Opinion reserved".

My perplexity! This, paramountly, was the right time. I thought I had enough money for Henry's fare and mine; I could arrange to leave the Press; I did want to go to Africa, and so did Henry.

It was you who came back to the subject:

"Well, Nancy—what about our trip? When are we going to think about where we are going, eh? And how we're going to get there, and *when*?"

"Let's have another drink over this, Norman. Let me see . . . Dahomey perhaps? That would be by a French Line."

"Not on your life!"

"Good heavens, why not? No Colour Bar on French boats!"

"That's not what I mean at all. A French boat! Catch me! They're not safe, most of them, ha! If there's a heavy sea they're liable to sink *at once*—and the life-boats, all except *one*, are perfectly useless. Only the crew know *which one* doesn't leak! Then, when there's an ugly rush of passengers for the life-boats, the crew make a rush for the good one and keep the passengers out of it with their revolvers . . ."

(That should have told me!)

"Well then, an English boat. We could . . ."

"Not on your life! The passengers will go to the captain in a body and complain about the presence of a black man with us. *I* like Henry—and so do you, ha! But the ordinary run of British

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passengers, and what's more, of British *colonial* passengers and *officials*, don't understand these things. They might like Henry when they got to know him—I daresay they would—I don't see how they could help it—but they won't give themselves the time to get to know him and they'll go in a body to the captain. Damned awkward, my dear. You'll see! I know them!"

(Both of these sallies at terrific speed.)

"Well then . . . a German boat?

"I've nothing against a German boat. Now, you make all the arrangements and tell me just *when* you want to start—and where you want to go—because I don't suppose *you've* made up your mind yet . . ."

This sort of thing went on a few days more, intermittently.

"Norman, I have begun to investigate boats and their destinations. If it has to be a German boat, the place they go to seems to be—mainly—Portuguese West Africa—somewhere down that way. What do you say?"

"That will do very well."

It now seemed almost a point of honour to proceed with the plan, although I had considerable doubts, and each time I talked to Henry he shook his head and his laughter increased. I noticed that you and he never referred to it in my presence! And we went on meeting for meals and seeing a good many different people in Montparnasse and at St Germain des Prés; and I continued working in my Press—and in bed.

Why on earth could we not decide? Should it all be quietly dropped?

"Norman—*Yes or No?*"

"I've already told you, I'm perfectly ready to start—tomorrow, if you like. But you must make all the arrangements."

After two or three more days of this, I thought 'It must be dropped'.

Then again you came back at me:

"Well, when do we leave—and where do we go? I'd like to get away."

"Right! Now, tomorrow morning, Norman dear, you come

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with me to the Woermann Line and we will see about boats, prices, sailings, everything, *together*."

You came with me and studied those promising folders. Where was it these fine luxury liners went? To *Waalfisch Bay*—a port in South West Africa. Right. And the prices of cabins and passage? Right. And the date of the next sailing? Right.

But *not* right at all, for me, the land of which *Waalfisch Bay* (also called *Walvis* on some maps) seems to be the main port. Why, this is almost South Africa! Not even Angola, Portuguese West Africa, but the enormous territory where the Germans practically exterminated the *Herreros* in 1904—a civilisation of hides, cattle and leather-work! Not an ounce of old carved ivory, not an inch of work in bronze or in wood—and where much, if I am not mistaken, is a series of great deserts, including even maybe the famous *Kalahari*? However, there it was. We now had the facts in hand—price-boat-date. *Your* move next! Once there one could go on elsewhere—possibly to the Congo? I was too tired to think. *You* would now have to decide. (And then, of course, we could begin all over again—only this time it would be much quicker.)

Henry had met you only rather recently, but it seems that he knew you much better than I (at least in this respect), for his laughter after being told of our expedition to the Woermann Line and the result it had produced: *Waalfisch Bay* (and all that was to be expected of the country) was monumental. When able to speak, he said: "Oh can't you see, Norman never had the *slightest* intention of going?"

That was the end of it all. For when you said a few days later:

"When do we start—have you done anything more about it?" I suggested that your role now in the whole matter was to make all the arrangements. At which some nebulous but remarkably valid objection arose on the spot, and, well . . . nothing happened at all. This was on a much more serious level than it may sound in retrospect—and a most peculiar kind of joke to be having with me, I told you. To which you replied:

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"It's not a joke at all, my dear. I'm perfectly ready to start tomorrow!"

The mystery has remained to this day.

But really, Waalfisch Bay, with its *Alice in Wonderland* name, what better could have been found to cap such a Snark of a plan?

It was *you* who went to Africa not so very long after!

Would one call that the theft of an idea?

Nothing of the kind! It was to visit an old friend of yours—Eric—in Nairobi. And, in due course, four or five engaging pages came to me out of that journey—your contribution to my large Anthology, "NEGRO", quite unique in the whole body of the book.

Richard Aldington had helped me with some good ideas in the early days of the HOURS PRESS and now both editions of *Last Straws*, a story of his we were doing, were selling well before publication. Why not send him some advance royalties? Off went a cheque from the temporary manager I had taken on for six months. To my surprise it came back, with an angry letter saying that the story had been given *me* to publish and not to the manager! "But the royalties are from the Press" I pointed out in reply, "what is the difference?" More expostulations followed until a real row by correspondence ensued. How well I remember that remark of yours, often pondered since, when I told you of this:

"Why *do* authors have such difficulties with each other? I'm sure *grocers* don't behave that way among themselves!"

I could look back at this time and recall how you and I never had the slightest trouble—not a comma's-worth—during the lengthy gestation of *One Day*.

And now I was possessed of a new idea which went down on paper on April 1, 1931, in the form of a circular: the making of an Anthology on the Negro race and its affiliations; there would be a good many people here and there, I knew already, who would

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collaborate. The vast subject so well known in the United States of America was little known in England, where one point of view was even "Why make such a book—aren't Negroes just like ourselves?" While I could see what was meant by this intellectual and scientific point of view, I could assure whoever it was who asked the question that if Negroes be like us their lives are mighty different!

Little as I could foresee the magnitude of that work when completed it did seem obvious that all of my time would go in studying the subject and collecting the material. No HOURS PRESS could run simultaneously; that was obvious. And that temporary manager cured me from putting my trust in anyone. Despite the careful contract made between us for a mere six months, that manager succeeded in being as false as Judas—and so, after having at one time doubled my small capital by my own hard work, the end was materially bitter when the HOURS PRESS ceased to exist.

Where were you all of this year? Part of the time in Calabria with Kenneth Macpherson, then in Arusha and Tanganyika; and I for some weeks in Harlem, New York, capital of Afro-America—amused, annoyed, perplexed and interested by American ways—Negro as well as white, as I began collecting the personal and other data for my Negro Anthology.

The Scottsboro case was going on, that abomination of racial injustice, and I sent you the appeal I made that was more particularly addressed to authors. Would you sign the protest? Yes! As did immediately André Gide and many of the writers in Britain. The facts of the monstrous frame-up of these nine Negro lads arrested on a false charge of rape, repeatedly tried and condemned in a lynch-atmosphere, were becoming well known. You would have liked one of my voluntary helpers in collecting funds for the legal defence: George Burke, sometimes unemployed and sometimes a pedlar—the way he threw his heart into everything

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that interested him, a cockney princeling rather than a down-and-out. George had very much of your *London Street Games* flavour.

How regrettable it is that we never went through those extraordinary anonymous letters that came to me the second time I was in Harlem, that is to say, the following year! They were *pre-eminently* material for your inspection. The arduous anthological road held many surprises and this time there had been enormous publicity, blather and ballyhoq about me in the American press (*all* of it, not only Hearst's!). There were some outrageous lies, fantastic inventions and gross libels. Such things would have been properly dealt with in English courts, where the question would have been put: "What is all this *about*?"—the answer given: "A large book is being prepared on the Negro race, *and it is factual*." Exactly that; not more. But in the United States the race-hysteria exploded, and surely its most ornate and roccoco outbursts were embodied in this spate of frantic, unsigned and threatening letters! I was "sure going to be taken for a ride . . ." Amusing enough, all of it—far more amusing yet at a distance, back in France, with half a ton of literary and sociological material for the book. And now on the Ile Calypso in the Dordogne river I sat working on Afro-America, turning for light relief to all these frenzied menaces which outnumbered by far the other messages—friendly ones those, from people who did sign their names, commending my interest and praising the line taken towards people of colour. It was here those fascinating pages of yours about Arusha came to me—without a suspicion of squeamishness at being surrounded by people with black skins—and I laughed at the great parabola it all makes: Africa—United States of America, Negroes by the million in both! What *would* you have said to these crazy letters, these frantic eruptions? And the Abbé Fénélon, on whose Telemachian island I now sat, he who had officiated at the Prieuré de Carennac across the river—what would he have thought of such outbursts of fury as lay beside me this August on his willow-thick sand-stretch? Things like:

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“Repair” (Prepare?) “for ransom 25,000 dollars will be demanding kidnaping H—B kidnaping inc.” And “You for your nerve should be burned alive to a stake”. One was signed “The Second Society of Caucasians”. Many were sex-mad and scatological; all were juicy. And none, judging by spelling, grammar or language, was written by a literate being. I should have liked these anonymous clowns and hoodlums lined up for our inspection! A few of the printable effusions went into that book—first-hand evidence of what happens in the United States of America when it is suspected that the truth is going to be set down in print about Coloured and White there!

You called your gay little piece “A Letter about Arusha”; the white set referred to is that of official circles. This, too, seemed a striking parabola to me: it was thanks to you in the first place that your present host had got a start in life, when he was an interesting but difficult boy in the London of your *Street Games* epoch, on bad terms with himself and the world. Now he was no less than a High Commissioner of Police in British East Africa!

Here, reproduced from “NEGRO”, is what you sent me:

A LETTER ABOUT ARUSHA

Florence, 22 Sept, 1931

Dearest Nancy,

You know I would sell my last shirt to oblige you. Going shirtless—yes, and with joy—for the rest of my life is a trifle in comparison with what you are expecting me to do.

Just glance, please, over the enclosed letter and then return it to me. You will see that it is dated April 24, 1925, and addressed to me by a publishing firm of the highest standing on both sides of the Atlantic.

They make a seductive offer: for a book dealing with my African experiences they will pay £100 advance for the United States and Canadian rights on account of a 15 per cent royalty. What is better: they offer to pay between £50 and £75 per article for a previous serialisation of the same book in their Magazine. Now, if they printed

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ten of these articles, I should already have about £600 in hand ; to say nothing of the American edition of the book and, simultaneously, the English one, for which I would receive at least as much again. Quite a tempting proposition, don't you think? Especially as I was so hard up at the time that I went out there on borrowed money.

And yet I never wrote a line for them ; not a single line. It could not be done. I was caught up on arrival at Arusha in the English set. Impossible, under those conditions, to learn anything new about the natives at first hand. You are shut out from them ; particularly if you know not a word of Swahili yourself.

That was my mistake. I should have left my countrymen alone, and picked up at Mombasa or Zanzibar a native guide familiar with the country and with the English language. Such people are to be found, if one looks for them. I should have avoided all intercourse with white officials—when wanted, they can always be found ; I should have camped out, and got my guide to initiate me into the life of the native population. Then one could have learned something.

Well, it has been a lesson, and that is why I can tell you nothing more about the natives in those parts than what you know yourself, namely that the Masai is a fine fellow who plasters his hair and body with mutton-fat and brown ochre, eats a whole sheep at a sitting (if he can get it), and is bored to death just now because the English discourage him from indulging in his old amusements of cattle-raiding and fighting. I think I sent you the photo of the Masai girl loaded with bangles. These are made out of the telegraph and telephone wires, of which they cut down a mile or two and then manufacture into such ornaments to the disgust, obviously, of the British postal authorities. Another of these girls refused to be photographed—did I send you that one?—and threw herself on the ground head downwards.

You have the picture of the Arusha boy in his post-circumcision finery ; there is a bow in his hand ; he is after birds. We took a fancy to each other and should have got on swimmingly if—if I had known a word of his language. As it was, I had to rely on the interpreting of my friend. One thing of interest I learned from this boy : he declared that they had no God of any kind, neither great nor small. He was positive on this point. The idea of adoring some divine being struck

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him as comical. That was a good beginning, I thought, if these people were ever to develop a national state of their own; one handicap the less.

You would also like the *Wagogos* whom I saw at Dodoma. The men wear bells or some other coquettish tinkling instrument on their ankles.

And that is all I can tell you. Please don't be annoyed with me; nobody can be more annoyed with me than I myself am. You will see more charming people—native, I mean—in the market-place of Arusha than you can see in Europe in a week of Sundays, and if I had learnt Swahili and not tangled myself up in the white set I could have had endless fun and discovered something worth telling you. What do you say to going there together one of these days?

Ever your loving

Uncle Norman

P.S.—I can invent, of course, if that is of any use to you.

You would be interested, for instance, in the *Bimbokulos*, one of the most remarkable tribes I came across. When a *Bimbokulo* woman wants to have a child she wanders about the jungle till she finds a nest of the giant python, which grows to a length of two or three hundred feet out there. She collects the eggs, takes them home, and sits on them till they are hatched. The young serpents are then cooked in an infusion made from the leaves of the *migwamba* shrub, and the husband must eat them at sunset. This is regarded as a certain cure for infecundity, which, as you know, is always the man's fault.

There is also a little-known cannibal tribe living on the shores of Lake Wyami; they deserve to be studied by some competent ethnologist. They call themselves *Wallawapuplas*, or "the festive ones", and are universally feared for their ferocity. I lived with them for four years and seven months and experienced nothing but kindness from young and old; their reputation for cruelty is much exaggerated. Though they file their teeth and smear their faces with white chalk like other cannibals, they devour only children, and them only on the "festive" day—the first Monday of every month. They have also certain polite aspirations; those singing contests, I mean, which are held on that same occasion. They take place at night to the accom-

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paniment (sometimes) of a flageolet called mbuma; a committee of experienced singers decides on the merits of the performers. Whoever gains the approval of this committee with some original and well-modulated song about love or war is presented with three young girls or one freshly slaughtered baby—according to choice. Bad singers are punished by having their fingers cut off, one for each wrong note. It is rare, among the Wallawapuplas, to meet a man with all the ten fingers of his hands complete. But what exquisite voices!

It is twenty years now since "NEGRO" came out, and this little piece of yours is as fresh as ever, the salutary note of humour in that great, serious Anthology of 150 contributors—referred to by you in *Looking Back*, as "A monstrous and most informative tome".

1933, 1934, 1935—how can we not have met in all that long time? I was in England for over a year, finishing the Anthology, then doing the entire lay-out and production, and not in Italy at any moment; and you, it seems to me, not in France. You were in Calabria again, at one moment, on that early spring journey in 1934 with Pino and Charles Prentice and a friend called Ian Parsons—as is told in Orioli's enchanting *Moving Along* where you are revealed really at your best.

How well fate served you with Pino—I have to say it yet again! No one else could have been so well suited as this wise, gay, well-rounded, witty little man, of so Italian an essence, whose engaging pages are the best description of you that could be, and of you "on the road", among all the rough ways and whimsies of Calabrian travel. The strenuousness of all that! And did you not go at one time with Pino to Goa and Pondicherry? What was it like? Why, just this, you told me:

"There's nothing to do, nothing whatever, except to lie in a cold bath with a huge whisky and soda—several times a day, if possible."

Your *Old Calabria* was evolved from many journeys long ago, and maybe that was the region in all Italy dearest to your heart. This seems further suggested in Kenneth Macpherson's beautiful

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published tribute to you—for both of you were there together again in 1932. Not many travellers can have known those arid paths, wild mountains, tricky short-cuts (often anything but) as well as you—those high-perched towns and villages where one arrived benighted and starving but always found wine in some dark, imperceptible back room in places where not even a tavern existed. Wine and talk! What an aroma arises from this book of yours, and from Orioli's too—those conversations with Calabresi and Albanesi and "Americani" returned from the United States—the old crones and mad people met with—the savouring of legends and tall tales—your interest in some of the children, a thing that increased as time went on.

How well this is put by Harold Acton, writing of you in 1937, in his *Memoirs of an Aesthete*:

"Norman could endure the society of fewer and fewer people over the age of fourteen, and I was touched that he still seemed glad to see me. He had not much patience with my generation: we seemed to him to lack zest and a positive view of life."

And he quotes words of yours in *Alone*: "A child is ready to embrace the universe. And, unlike adults, he is never afraid to face his own limitations."

A most important aspect of you, this feeling for children! (Who was it said you should have been a schoolmaster?) I used to notice the way you spoke to them—as if they were on the same level as yourself. Never any silly "talking-down", a thing one remembers with contempt when it occurred in one's own childhood.

Your way with "difficult cases" was beautifully illustrated by my cousin's account, and he benefited himself, for his Italian cook Maria, had been distraught by her boy and was now soothed back to her normal state:

"Maria's son was absolutely hellish, a perfect little devil. She could do nothing with him; he was about twelve years old. Norman said, 'Give him to me!' and took charge of him for three or four weeks—took him away with him. On return, the

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boy was unrecognisable. His manners had become charming, he was pleasant and willing, obedient and ready to help. Maria was dumbfounded. Norman had entirely transformed him!"

1933—that was the year your *Looking Back* came out in London—a lively, autobiographical assembly, most interesting yet far from complete, I am sure. What a striking idea to have woven around that large Japanese bronze bowl, from which you extracted all the visiting-cards deposited there during several decades . . . (Now let me see: who was *this*?) old friends and odd characters, both. A fine way of dealing with moments of one's life, summarily or to the tune of several pages a-piece!

1934 and 1935—how can we not have met? There were, of course, letters passing between us, and I wish I had yours now—those three large stacks kept neatly in elastic bands, all of which are gone on the spate of war, pillage and destruction—all, up to the start of the cataclysm, except four. We never said to each other—did we—how much better it is one cannot know the future, no matter how much one may suspect it?

From this letter at least I know where you were at the beginning of 1936:

Syracuse, 8 Feb, 1936

Dearest Nancy,

Came down here with Pino to escape the cold and certain other drawbacks, you may guess which—from Florence. But the only decent hotel is closed. We are returning to Florence again tomorrow. I don't know how long I shall be able to stand it. Not very pleasant just now—the political atmosphere, I mean. Love to Victor.

Norman.

Much love, Pino.

It seems to me this was the first time "Political atmosphere" was mentioned by you. The atmosphere must be odious, I reflected, on account of the sanctions applied by Britain—which were not preventing Mussolini, it seemed apparent, from being about to defeat Abyssinia in one of the foulest wars in all massacring history.

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Some words in the next letter make me search in vain for what can have evoked them. Had the then often slender state of my finances become such that I had written something causing you to think I might be in need of a loan? Here, at any rate, was that generous spirit of yours rushing forward . . . And it had sometimes been said that you were "close with money"! Of all the nonsense—stemming out of the Magnus-Lawrence affair, of course.

Florence, April 4, 1936

. . . Dreadfully sorry to hear about your low finances. If it gets beyond endurance, let me know; I can squeeze something out. Don't hesitate about this . . . Endless love, N.

And then a card of the Cortile del Palazzo Vecchio:

Florence, June 23, 1936

Just got yours of the 20th. What is your address at Geneva? And when will you be there, from when to when? Send me a card here at once. I may be in the neighbourhood just then. But don't delay about this. N.

Geneva! It was the first of several times I went there to the League of Nations, as a reporter, on this occasion, for the Associated Negro Press of the United States and a West African paper—to that Session which the Powers intended should give the quietus to Ethiopia and end the pleadings of Haile Selassie. Had we been going to meet? Whether or no you came to Switzerland, meet we certainly did not, for everything but reporting was out of the question for me during those strenuous days, and you were not in Geneva itself. Of an evening, when the last words had been written and sent, with what disgust was one filled at the way "they" carried on—breaking their own clauses and covenants, with supra-human cynicism. Such was my baptism in matters of this kind. And I remember wondering how you would have stomached it, remember hearing your voice when, relaxing at the end of one more appalling day, I lifted that bright goblet of Swiss wine to you: "Not on your life, my dear, *not on your life!*"

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Yet there were words that would have greatly pleased you—none fallen from any of the statesmen but sprung from the astute brain of one of the regular journalists stationed here and evoked by what was taken as “a mere incident” in the general proceedings. “A mere incident”; so be it! Stefan Lux, a Jewish photographer, shot himself in the Assembly Hall one morning while the session was going on. He died that night. Referring to the pistol-shot of this hapless man who, in his despair, had fired it appealing to the League and to Britain for justice against Hitler’s persecution of his race, Ibbetson James had said (and I think written in his despatch to the *Morning Post* or the *Observer*):

“Either a salvo over the dead body of the League, or the first shot in the next World War.”

Fifteen days or so after the end of this historical Session the war began in Spain and I went there as a journalist, arriving on August 11 in Barcelona. The whole next three months spent in towns, villages and going to the fronts were so engrossing that I could think of nothing else; and next I was in Tangiers and French Morocco, where much was to be learned about the way the Moors were impressed (mainly) into a war that was no concern of theirs.

The things of Spain took hold of me entirely and, back in France next spring it seemed of point to find out how writers in Britain felt about it all.

Would it not be good to send out a Questionnaire? I had soon composed one. The feeling was considerable among the writers in England, judging by the number of answers that poured in, and the way *Authors Take Sides*—as it was called when published that autumn—sold out immediately, some 3,000 copies, I think.

Would you “take sides”? Would you even answer?

Yes! Although you “detested politics” (and even the Spanish War was that to you) an answer came forthwith. It had to be classified as one of the 16 “Neutral” replies among the 127 pro-

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Republican and the 5 pro-Franco answers. Honestly straightforward at least, it produced some exclamations:

"I don't know what to say about your questionnaire. I cannot excite myself over nations and causes and creeds—my contempt for humanity in general is too great. Individuals are the only things that interest me. If Spaniards like to cut each other's throats and get Germans and Russians to help them—why not let them? It's not my affair. If they eat each other up to the last man, like Kilkenny cats, let them! This will sound unsatisfactory to you. But if you want the truth, there it is. Nobody is going to compel me to 'take sides'. To hell with sides. If Fascists annoy me, I hop it. If Communists annoy me, I hop it. Everything that ends in 'ism' is just b . . . , so far as I am concerned."

Such was your view! Some innate dislike of Spaniards? By no means. Had you not often told me "Perhaps the man I have liked best in all my life was a Spaniard—met in St Petersburg."? And now again it seemed strange to me that, drawn as you were to the eastern and southern shores of that Mediterranean Basin, no curiosity had ever led you, even passingly, to the western end—to that Iberia of old, every bit as interesting as Calabria and Tunisia. No, there was no animosity in you towards Spaniards, although one's concern seemed an "ism" to the rugged individualist! And not so very long after . . . what was this? You were telling me:

"I'm perfectly ready to take charge of a Spanish child—orphan or otherwise."

"A Spanish child, yes"—you said thoughtfully a few months later. "In fact, I am perfectly prepared to come with you to Barcelona tomorrow if you think I could find one there—boy or girl—to bring back with me."

To bring back where? To Vence, where you had been living some months already. For Florence, well . . . Now you told me a little about the situation. Not that life in Florence was

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over, but things had to be settled first . . . (How long it seemed since I had seen you, how unaware I had been of your difficulties.) Well, a very ugly situation had come about in Florence on account of jealousy—did I know what the jealousy of Italian families could be like? No, of course not! Intrigues behind one's back, the neighbours taking a hand, scurrilous inventions evolved out of perfectly ordinary matters. The English were detested by many; that too was a factor. Finally the Fascist authorities looked as if they were about to intervene. And the old trouble over the publication of the *Limericks*, and some other difficulties of Pino's as well, would inevitably have been dragged up again. On the whole, you had made up your mind on the spot. You had, in fact, "hopped it". Dear me . . . The lawyer, meanwhile, was thrashing it out.

We were in Narbonne at that moment, you sitting on the edge of my bed and I in it with a temperature of 103, an influenzal thunderbolt the very morning that John Banting was arriving from London with a camera to join me in a journey to Spain. You had come to see me off. You did not realise that a passport had now to be specially endorsed, which entailed "a valid reason", such as some kind of mission. The French made difficulties; the Spaniards honey-combed with spies in the Republican zone, were, naturally, prudent. Even the most accredited journalists often had considerable difficulty now and much, once in Spain, depended on being "listo"—personally resourceful in every sense. I had my ways and means, I told you, besides my credentials—but you seemed chagrined at not being able to buy a ticket and come with us. What would your stated "mission" have been?

"If you find me a child I will come to the frontier and take charge when you return."

And now John arrived and I sank back into my torpor.

What did you do with him all of that day? In great high spirits both of you came back—from Carcassonne. That is where you had been. But to Hell with its battlements and all that! In November night comes down far too early for sightseeing after

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lunch. As for *hastening* over lunch so as to climb up and down all those infernal crenelated walls—*what on earth for?* Besides, the wine in Carcassonne is very good! It had been an enjoyable session, I thought, judging from the mood of both—embellished with some fine drawings John had made of you. For my part, I was succeeding in sleeping and drugging myself out of the fever.

How would you have felt about all those drawn sabres and bayonets and angry French officials three or four days later at the frontier in Cerbère station? Unlike John, *you* would have realised it was touch and go. The French permit out of the country this time had to be a verbal one, promised by a difficult man who, I feared, *might* go back on his word at the last moment. And then? Then other means would have to be sought. But enter Spain we did.

And now came two absorbing months—first in the icy cold and hunger of Barcelona, then in the slightly attenuated conditions of Valencia, and lastly in freezing, starving Madrid under the December shells. Everywhere, but here most of all, was that fortitude, that innate faith in its cause of the Spanish people.

But as to finding you a child—no. That was something I could not undertake, working all day as I was, unable to tackle the endless arrangements such a thing would have entailed. And there were many refugee-children in France already.

Back there in the new year of 1938, I don't seem to remember you in Paris for very long. Was it not in March that you and I and your eldest son, Archie, had that pleasant yet rather sad meal together in Vernon, my local town on the Seine? That small restaurant we ate in was bombed to oblivion just over two years later. We were, I remember, overshadowed by all that was going on; that month it was Austria. The picture of you and Archie remains in mind. Archie (whom of course I knew already), well-set like you, good-looking, of somewhat smaller feature and more rounded in face, golden-haired and blue-eyed, with a pleasant manner, and, at moments, something of *your* manner.

An awful premonition was gnawing the patronne of that little place and she told us repeatedly she felt something dreadful might

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be coming. “Ça va mal, ça va mal!” was already much to be heard. It was her own hotel she had in mind, those very days that Nazi boots were marching through the streets of Vienna. I think I have never read so many newspapers as at that time. The effect in English is a sledge-hammer; in French “un coup de massue”, and I had both. One is worn out, suffocated, emptied of thought. All that remains is a furious sense of indignation. How much I would have preferred to be a regular press-correspondent, to have been right *in* the vortex at that time.

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WHICH of us suggested it to the other, that Tunisian journey we took together in April, 1938? I cannot even remember! We were quick to start as soon as it had been decided and, despite so much that has happened since, it all persists in seeming not so very long ago . . . Your *fifth* trip there, you told me, when I came to fetch you in Vence.

This rather gay, and, on the whole, beautiful little hill-town, was perforce a new home to you. It could not and it did not replace Florence and you wanted to think of it only as a temporary stage until the legal discussions going on in Italy had been satisfactorily terminated—if such were to be the case. The lawyer was writing you even now, asking why you did not return, but the whole atmosphere there was too unpleasant; there ought to be a guarantee that you would not be bothered, once you went back.

Some congenial people lived in Vence, one of them being "Auntie". This old English appellation made me laugh a good deal and it suited her admirably. First spoken of by you with one of those non-committal shakes of the head, Martha Gordon Crotch (or, as you dubbed her, "Martha of Hartlepool, the incorrigible puritan") was by then a regular institution there, with her souvenirs-and-old-furniture shop. A great admirer of yours, she was also quite a confidante. Sharp, lively and funny, sometimes kindly and really very malicious as well, she was an assiduous

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keeper of innumerable diaries full of chattering little items—and also an inveterate knitter. More than one impressive sample of her work adorned your body at various times! She wrote pages and pages of reminiscences, those on India being unique. “Stick to it!”, you told her. Other chapters were very interesting on the score of Frank Harris, and Emma Goldman, and the D. H. Lawrences . . . Of course, that was how you had met, through Lawrence’s widow, some years before, in Florence. There was a good deal of talk about them between you. But, admired as I had much of *Sons and Lovers* and *The Prussian Officer*, directly D. H. was discussed something seemed to be projected into the atmosphere which made me positively shudder. The way I should have liked to have seen him would have been *with you*. I am not at all clear as to whether or no you were even on speaking terms with him after the Magnus affair—(But of course you were, as is mentioned in *Looking Back*, when you saw him in 1930, shortly before his death, for the last time.) I could imagine both of you being extremely guarded if you found yourselves together . . . An idle speculation, for at this time Lawrence had already been dead for several years.

A literary figure then in Vence was Robert Nichols, the poet, whom I had known quite well but not seen for a very long time. I think he had borne me a sentimental grudge—yet he must have written impassioned poems to others too since then? I had not plucked and bound the laurels for his crown, being unable to see him—long ago—as “genius misunderstood”. Now, I assured you both, he was very much calmed down—no more dithyrambics, distressing poetical ravings, posturings and declamations . . . “But a good deal of ego-mania!” you both said. And another literary figure on the coast was Michael Arlen, met again pleasantly and most fortunately at the very moment the Consul wanted a British witness to my new passport.

I had arrived feeling battered and greatly worried by the state of everything—so clearly heading for war—my heart and mind full of the things of Spain. I could not talk to you about this, nor did I want to. Again I mused on how two people with such totally

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different interests could get on as we did. After all, on account of my feelings about the "Colour Question", and Colonies, and the Spanish struggle, I must perforce come into that category you dismissed as "meddlers"? This bothered neither of us in the very least, however, and here we were, going off confidently for several weeks. For your sake, on this occasion, I could have wished myself transformed into some care-free Englishman whose aim would be "good living" and easy travel among all the things to be seen and done in Tunisia, someone who would join you in the face of all sudden set-backs with a "Let's have a good lunch anyway!"—sound, practical philosophy. To be sure, I subscribed to all of this, but, but, but . . .

Of Tunisia what I wanted most was to see something of the way the Arabs live, so as to write a few articles on general conditions. Was this going to be compatible with what we should be doing? It turned out to be perfectly so.

Now, what would you tell me about the country before we started? My question seemed to strike you dumb. Should we have to ride camels—often, sometimes, never? Is the camel now part of past travel, unless specially asked for? Much of Tunisia is sand, and that suggested tracks and dunes . . . I cannot think why the camel even occurred to me, for one never need go near one in such parts of Algeria and Morocco as I knew. "Camels? *No.*" On the whole, you were very uncommunicative.

I marvelled at your energy, your vitality—nearly seventy years old now and not in the best of health, ready to start off alone with me, now forty-two. How can I have seemed to you? "Restless" was a word I heard you pronounce fairly often throughout the years! And it is about the only thing *I do* know that you thought of me—ever. But surely not "*Cinquecento*"? I must leave it at that.

The sky was horribly over-full as we set off on the 10th of April, the aspect of the Mediterranean that which one hates the most—a welter of white and blue in furious conflict, all the coast resounding with great packets of water against the rocks. A hideously rough sea was responding to the Mistral which had been

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blowing for three days. No one finds comfort at such times in saying "The crossing is only twenty hours, the boat not bad at all . . ." Clearly, we were in for it.

I don't doubt we immediately had some strong drink as soon as on board in Marseilles. Not so very many are the things that alcohol will not allay or throw its mysterious, protecting veil over! And anything is better than sea-sickness, anything. The ship was dreadfully crowded and one could hardly stand up on deck on account of the roughness. Presently it became clear that few were those who wanted to, and they disappeared below. But why were these figures here that one connects, invariably, with land, assembled around their sinister vans drawn up behind corners on the periphery of street-demonstrations? *Les flics!* 350 Gardes Mobiles off to Tunisia at one go! This batch, it seems, was being sent there "just in case", or to make a show, for the "troubles" in Tunis of the previous week were now considered over. The storm soon had its way with them, however, and they too disappeared below. Even so—the seascape now purified—that afternoon seemed interminable as we rolled and pitched further into a more and more determined, if sunlit, gale. I stood battling with all my will against sea-sickness. Would it never get dark? And where were you?

There is something peculiar about a storm; it seems to confuse the geography of a boat that is new to one and it took me some time to find you. Oh yes, it was quite a gale—but you had been lying down fairly oblivious, or even impervious to it all. I could stand up now and even walk properly, having taken off my high-heeled shoes, my hat as well, and wedged my typewriter into some angle of a bunk in that suffering cabinful of women. *We* would now go to the Bar and just sit there as long as necessary, and then have something to eat—even that, maybe!

The Bar was empty, save for the bartender who looked at us with surprise and admiration, we the only two passengers left upright. How much time passed in here? We must have had something to drink—gently and progressively, I should say—although the rolling and pitching and tossing had got into my

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head so well that time and whisky became blent—yes—and place too. For somewhat later we were no longer, it seemed to me, in the same Bar? Or had it just got so much larger that it was now the Saloon, with a piano in the corner? I don't suppose we consulted each other about this. It struck me that we were in exactly the same mood—thoroughly defiant. We were conquering the atrocious storm. More whisky, and more whisky, and then more yet . . . And then, possibly, dinner!

Let me remember just how you sat, with a rather funny expression on your face at that moment: *bien campé*, your legs apart, holding on to your stick between them, at a table that was screwed to the floor, and on the table had just been placed a large tumbler of whisky-and-soda. I was standing up, perorating, I think (that may have been the cause of your peculiar expression), not far from the side of the ship I could clutch at when the next roll came. The bartender, more and more delighted with us, had just given me another whisky-and-soda too, and I held it fast, noticing it was not in a tumbler but in a wineglass. And suddenly—there was your drink swept off the table; it flew across the Saloon while the piano (I think it was then) gave a groan. As the ship righted herself, the bartender made a dart at you with another tumbler, setting it before you with a slightly admonishing smile: "*Buvez donc, Monsieur!*" Your hand reached out, and . . . presto hop! . . . another roll, another drink gone as before. *Décidément* . . . The bartender would now think of some other way. . . And was I all right—said he—and my drink? "*Oui, oui, merci. Parfaite . . . ment . . .*"

The strangest sensation began as I finished the word. I was *flying*. Flying through the air without any possible doubt. And without effort of any kind. That feeling came at the moment of descent on the ground against one of the sides of the ship. It didn't last long. For lo, I was flying again, from that side back to the other. A gasp . . . And then flying for the third time, over anew. Would this ever stop? Was there anything—I now thought in bewilderment and anguish—that I ought to *try* to do? At this point I became aware of something in my line of vision—another

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body partly projected into the air. It was the bartender and he caught and held me fast as the fourth levitation was in progress. I got to my feet breathless, looked at what I had in one hand . . . It was the full wineglass, *not one drop of which had been spilled*.

"Norman! Can you explain this?"

You were convulsed with laughter, simply convulsed, bent double. You had not moved; all was well with you. Oh what a *divertissement*! The funniest sight you had ever seen—*ever*. I had flown, flown, flown, right across that wide Saloon, coming up with a bump on one side, and then rolled over and come flying back, and then over again. *Dee-licious*! Quite unhurt, I too marvelled, was glad to know what had happened, and wished I could have seen myself. And not a drop spilled . . .

"*Une belle performance, Madame!*" said the bartender. And then his face changed: "*Mon Dieu, regardez le piano . . .*" It had broken its moorings and taken a disastrous ride across the whole of that long, empty space.

Some time later, I know, we had dinner, possibly going through most of the meal out of sheer cussedness in the dining-room which the storm gave us to ourselves. It was getting even rougher and finally, as you thought you would go to bed, I knew I should never be able to find the cabin, far away and down below, that I was supposed to be in. The thought of what it would be like, probably infiltrated with water as well, was another deterrent. Let those three suffering women do without me, by all means. I could sit and doze and dream and lean about anywhere on this gloriously empty deck, providing I made no effort to go anywhere else. But soon it began to get cold. I had wandered about a little—shut now was the Bar (or Saloon)—I had got lost. At some time or other of this night which now seemed to have acquired a certain magic of its own—(were we not ploughing land? Such, unquestionably was the sensation of those strong, driving strokes, those purposeful, conquering thrusts into resisting depths)—at some time or other I was talking . . . yes, to whom? To one of the engineers—possibly—who was suggesting that he would like to show me all the sights of Tunis ashore tomorrow night—

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pourquoi pas? But this soon passed, and I thought I would now lie down. On what? Ah, a most convenient pile of dry luggage in the lee of one of those many companionways. As I sank into perfect sleep the great ploughing rhythmically continued.

About seven in the morning an unsuspected cabin-door opened, and a friendly voice said "*Venez donc chez nous, on a de la place*"—a touching instance of one human being's gratuitous kindness to another. She was the wife of a French gendarme going with their children to join her husband in the *Orient*. This awful storm! She had been through typhoons in the Yellow Sea; *nothing* as bad as this!

Finally Tunis hove into sight, at eleven. How right had been my instinct about that cabin—the shoes and typewriter drenched with sea-water, the hat gone for good, the occupants wraiths of themselves . . . My lighter too had vanished during the night's peregrinations. Curiously enough, I had not the slightest hang-over. And you? Not the least little bit!

It was a glazed sort of morning ashore and nothing seemed to stand out, which may be partly why I had no strong first impressions of the capital. Well, soon enough you were saying we need not stay here long, we had best go on towards the south, and into the desert.

As in other North African towns, Arab and European are in separate sections, and presently we stood admiring that great old stone arch, the introduction to the indigenous quarter. This, yes, had character! The *souks* and bazaars and streets of open shops and stalls overflowing with bright stuffs, metal and pottery were fine. Yet we did not like Tunis much. Congested and pressed together physically and morally, it was not happy. Anything but happy at this time. For "the troubles" were only just over and we were told much about them and of the great demonstration by the Neo-Destour—the Arab Nationalist Movement—for the release of three of its leaders. Stones had flown and rifles had answered; officially there were nine dead and sixty wounded—figures, they held, that were well under the truth. And the papers—almost as many blank spaces as printed columns; the censorship, that.

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"This is a colony, my dear, although it is called La Régence!"

Much did I learn from that cultured Tunisian lawyer, Maître Tahar Essafi—an embodiment of tact, prudence, intelligence and progressive spirit. Our various Italian waiters and Maltese taxi-drivers, all within those three or four days, were only too glad to talk to us of the 50,000 Italians in Tunis itself, many of them ardent Fascists. And what would happen in the new War that seemed to be coming—would Mussolini attempt to seize the country? Traces of animosity were visible against the Jews "because of the privileges granted them in commerce". Stray conversations with Europeans suggested that a great deal in colonising here is of the trading-counter kind: get rich quick and then leave; no real interest in the country. And *that* was just the same in the days when you came here first and had some apt comparisons to make with the ways of British settlers—in the Gafsa of 1910!

"Population: two and a half million; 460,000 children of school-age (Arab) without schools." It was at night in bed that I went over and added to my notes, wishing I had been here at the time you first saw and wrote of Tunisia so scrupulously and with such good spirits, in *Fountains in the Sand*.

Where was it we had so much trouble with the food? In Tunis itself, mainly: "All this grease! Take it away, I can't eat it. Bring me two light-boiled eggs instead!" As they came and you stabbed the hearts out of them with a savage spoon, I was positively shocked, for I had never seen you do this sort of thing before, you who could engulf platters of leathery macaroni and even ask for more. Yes, but dammit, that was in Italy! Here the meals, try as we did to find better cooking, were insufferable.

"Muck! *Portatelo tutto via!*" you would exclaim, running the words together in high staccato, to the stupefaction of various waiters who all seemed to know Italian. Yet we had some pretty fine Tunisian wines—that dark red Carthage, for one, seemingly twice as strong as any in France.

"We'll have to pool our expenses," you said to me suddenly, "otherwise everything will get into an inextricable muddle!"

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Now just what did you mean by that?

"You or I must take charge of all the money, otherwise . . ."

"But how can we, Norman? We shan't be together every minute. Either of us may want to buy something when alone!"

"It will be perfectly inextricable otherwise; you'll see!"

"Oh come, now—Share of cars and meals as we go along . . . but what about those doubles you sometimes like after dinner and that I don't join you in? Or why should you have to part-pay for my cigarettes or a piece of stuff I might want? No, no! No "pool"!"

Whichever way it was to work, I wanted none of it.

What a tussle we had over "pool". You looked very grumpy and went on muttering "inextricable". No! But let you, by all means, have all the wine you wanted at what seemed to me physically impossible hours for drinking: the very middle of the afternoon. Thus different are digestions, and temperaments, and moods—and capacities.

It may have been in Carthage itself, that last flicker of "pool"—certainly the nearest we ever got to a disagreement! Alas, poor Carthage. You had been telling me all along that there was practically nothing left; yet those two broken columns and scattered stones in the arena—could this really be all? Depression descended upon me, and possibly upon you. But come, come! A bottle of red Carthage wine forthwith; in fact, two! In this, that hushed mid-afternoon, I could not somehow join you—the wrong mood entirely! And no evocation of Carthage whatever arose at the sight of the good collection of Greek and Roman remains in the Bardo Museum which we went to next. It was even difficult for me to think of Roman antiquity here at all, here in this now dual land that is both Arab and French.

What impression—you asked me—had I of the country after our first three days? The word that tentatively came was "muted", as if everything in sight were rather weary and trampled on around Tunis—an impression of course reinforced by those battered old vehicles drawn by skeletal horses, one of which had driven us out to Carthage. In these at least one could see around

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one, which was maddeningly impossible for all those inevitable closed cars.

The struggle we had with them! Not one for hire that could be at least partly opened; the drivers even thought us mad in asking for such a thing. Not to be allowed to see things more slowly as we drove about . . . That too put me in many a bad temper, as you must have noticed. But, admirable travelling companion that you were, I cannot tell what criticisms you had of me, for you certainly kept them to yourself! My only one of you was what seemed a slight tendency to over-fuss: "*Will that taxi come in time or not for the train?*" Knowing your Tunisia, you were not wrong, for many are the places where only *over-fussing* will ensure departure!

Leaving Tunis we set out—by closed car—for Kairouan and the South, a simple, well-made itinerary. I think Gafsa was the place most in your thoughts. It had some peculiar attraction, for you had spent a considerable time there, collecting (on the Meda Hill) stones and flint-implements that were additional proof of the age of the world. And written a good deal there too. Lived there for a time, in fact—in the most excruciating cold. We were certainly going to Gafsa; this very night, to be sure.

As we sped southwards, the name struck me adversely—abrupt, jagged, dagger-like sound. Is it not rather like an oath? (After being there I decided it could well be an oath, spat out in malediction on leaving: "Gafsa!")

Driving towards Kairouan far too fast, I thought at that moment how much I should have liked to walk some of the way so as to look at everything . . . And oh, what was this extraordinary group on the road? Five or six Arabs picking up an old tramline without any proper tools, one of them using another's shoulder as a sort of lever. I wanted to stop and look at that! And what were these small children doing, standing opposite each other on each side of the highway, holding up a little knot of something with a hopeful gesture? The fourth or fifth pair revealed this to be small bunches of wild asparagus. Would any speeding car of the many stop and buy? These emaciated children with their asparagus

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(and sometimes flowers) became to me later one of the national emblems of Tunisia. Still more so was the movement of the Bedouini, the nomad people of whom we saw so many—always heading towards Tunis. Gaunt and thin as their camels, driving their meagre sheep along—what were they doing in this manner that had nothing casual about it but that seemed, rather, a migration?

“*Ils vont réclamer*,” was the laconic answer.

You said this must, obviously, be a bad year—drought, maybe. That is enough to ruin the nomads who are not always in such a state of visible *misère*. In the past . . . Yes, what of “in the past?” I asked you.

“It was nothing like this, even four years ago—when I was here last—all of this poverty.”

“And all that begging in Tunis—was there less of that too?”

“About the same. A lot of them are professionals who would scorn to do anything else, you know. Some of these Arab boys are *trained* not to come home without a coin.”

“And how does Tunisia compare with India?”

“About the same, I should say—for the natives.”

“How drooping and sickly, how wretched many of the Arabs look . . .”

“Give them a little good food and they’ll soon stand up again! That’s just it . . . On the whole, I think there’s less *ophthalmia* to be seen than when I was here *first*.”

Ils vont réclamer. What could that mean? It was our Italian driver who told us later in the day, at Enfidaville, that pleasant little town where we made a short stop:

“They come from all over the country now, as you see them, with their flocks, always heading for the towns *to ask for help*. *Réclamer*, that’s it. A little food is given them, and a little money—by the authorities; they stay for two or three days and then go on again—to the next town. A very bad year . . . And not only for the nomads”, he added, “but for the world. My own brother,

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doing his military service in Italy—what happens to *him*? He gets impressed into fighting Franco's battles in Spain! That's where he is now, sent there as a regular soldier. Let no one talk to *me* about Italian 'volunteers' for the Nationalists!"

How much we liked Kairouan—large, white, lordly and resplendent, obviously the aristocrat of Tunisian towns, and a holy city beside. The capital of "Ifriquiya" in the 9th century, you told me, with 386 mosques. Today, parts of it were animated and busy, the *souks* far more prosperous-looking than those of Tunis. Soon we were in the Grand Mosque among magnificent carved columns and elaborately decorated ceilings, where the spacious sense of ease and cleanliness is in such contrast to the bald, peeled, dirty aspect of so much outside the city.

And then there was the Mosque of the Barber, to which—you informed me—students used to come and where they lived free during the whole period of their studies—that was something worth while! A civilisation to be respected on account of its own respect for knowledge and its encouragement of learning—whatever else could be said against certain aspects of Arab life! And those lovely carpets for which Kairouan is famous . . . But as we had lunch, arose the voice of today and it said woefully: "Where are all the people who will buy our rugs—where are the tourists? They should be here, and alas . . ."

Flaming-rich, gold and carmine was the sky as we strolled just outside Kairouan, for one of those sunsets was in the making that have caused me to think sometimes that certain Kabyle colours and, even, designs, in Algeria, may have been inspired by such rhapsodic cloud-effects. We now had a companion, for a rather attractive half-Negro Arab attached himself to us. Mannerly, that is what he was in particular, this adolescent of the name of Roma, and finding us willing listeners, he told us much. For one, there had never been such poverty as now. Bad seasons were partly the cause, but not all of it. The Front Populaire Government in France—how many promises it had made, but these had not been implemented. Yes, all sorts of promises: of work, of reforms, of aid and of new measures. As he talked, he seemed to be voicing

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complaints in a new way. As if, added to the bad seasons and nature's cruel droughts, the broken promises of the Front Populaire, which people had desperately wanted to believe in, had caused the Tunisian Arabs to feel hurt, *morally* pained besides being angrily disappointed. Suddenly he told us he was of an age to be married. He was sixteen, he said, and could not afford it: "My grandfather was rich; there were many flocks. And now, look at me!"

Less ragged than most, with a gentle pride of bearing, and clean. He spoke excellent French. "Does everyone speak it as you do?" I asked. "Indeed no. The Bedouini don't, for instance. And there aren't enough schools. I speak French, because I love to learn things."

He went on talking about the nomads, calling them "processions of poverty". They walked hundreds of miles to the towns to ask for food. A few provisions and a little money were handed them and then they were sent on—anywhere else. Sometimes they camped long enough in one place to plant a small patch, living on it with their flocks until it wore out. "And this year the lambs are all dying . . ." It seemed to me that Roma would be an excellent guide to the Arab mind, as well as to rural Arab life, because he was obviously truthful and candid, and besides, he seemed to have taken a liking to us.

More children stood in pairs with their asparagus as we sped away from Kairouan, and soon the desert began.

"Look carefully now, Nancy! We may see something interesting in the air—possibly a mirage."

The desert! It starts imperceptibly, in a progressive merging of earth, ground, sand. Mountains were on the horizon and now and again a smoky white light could be seen in the sky, and *that*, you said, might be sand drawn up by the wind. When it comes down, it may cover up whole stretches of road. No wonder so much money has to be spent on these main-ways of communication, subject, as they are, to phenomena such as this, and also to the violence of rains which now and again split the surface badly. Camels were soon passing us—by the score, by the hundred.

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Just as you were telling me "The camel was unknown here before Caesar, and in current use by the 4th century", you broke off:

"Do you know what is on the back of *that* one? That is a corpse, my dear. You can tell by the shape—swathed exactly like a mummy."

All European traffic seemed now to stop; not a car, not even a cart was to be seen, nor even the most elementary pair of wheels along this stretch, or on the many rough tracks that went off from it on both sides.

"There's no need for such, none whatever! Not a thing to transport! Except . . . Do you know what this part of the desert produces? Esparto grass—which becomes "India paper". That's all. Not another thing. And a camel will do to carry quite a big load of that."

More processions of Bedouini advanced through the oncoming darkness—the men in long, dirty, ragged white cloaks, the women in dark blue draperies, some of them with fluttering orange veils or scarlet stuffs on their heads, and not veiled as are other Arab women. They are a different race and quite apart. I could think of nothing finer than such processions in some old time of ease, in years when the lambs were not "all dying" but gambolled alongside the healthy ewes, and the men, women and children in windborne draperies strode, or rode on their tall white and brown camels. A civilisation of wool; the riches of the tribes coming from the amount of wool they took from their flocks, bleached and worked into cloth and sold—a part of the profit being invested in a form of portable capital: those massive, old, richly-wrought silver bracelets, pins, ear-rings and necklaces that the Bedouini women still wear—while practically starving, one might add. To be sure, in European market-value, these ancient silver ornaments do not rank so very high. In them I saw, rather, something like the traditional standing of the wearer, one of the classical properties of the tribe, a centuries-old custom embodied in silver.

Thinking and conversing of such things, the aspect of Gafsa

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was not clearly preceptible to me on arrival, and besides, it was dark. I think you had waited till now to tell me:

“You don’t know the Arab saying about this place! ‘*Gafsa is miserable; its water is blood; its air is poison; you may live there a hundred years without making a single friend*’ . . . I wonder how we shall find it! Lucky for us it hasn’t rained. Because there are two Gafsas: the Arab town and the European agglomeration about three miles away, and there is a river in between. Now, when it rains hard, that rises, and one town is cut off from the other—very awkward for both, you know!”

It was rather an ordinary little hotel we went to on arrival, unpretentious but seemingly adequate, except that the air appeared laden with a particular odour I could not identify.

I read that night what you had written when you were here first of all—twenty-eight years before. These chapters in *Fountains in the Sand* are informative in many ways; there are speculative deductions about various civilisations, fascinating descriptions of veiled figures in crumbling courtyards, and an apt irony, full of fair-minded pros and cons, concerning the ways of the French and other Europeans in Gafsa then. That water-spring story! That “warm element” welling up from under the majestic old Kasbah fort, to run into a pool, of which you wrote:

“*Nearly all Gafsa draws its supply of cooking and drinking water from this fetid and malodorous mere . . . A fine example of French inefficiency, this abreuvoir. Two hundred francs would suffice to tap the liquid a few yards higher up, by means of a common cast-iron pipe, whence it would rush out, pure and undefiled, to fill in a few moments those multitudinous water-skins that are now laboriously furnished, by hand, out of the often tainted pool below.*”

And that chapter of conversations in the Café, during which one Frenchman exclaimed to his opponent: “*Progressive policy be damned! We have held Gafsa for the last thirty years, and what have we done to improve the place? Nothing.*” The advocate of progress replied that twenty-seven pepper-trees had been planted . . .

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As I walked about Gafsa next morning, I wondered if the scornful attitude of the French had not had an effect on this thoroughly antipathetic place that I was trying hard to like! The town seemed to hate itself, to be its own enemy. A vicious circle, here, perhaps? The French scorned it because it was, visibly, odious. Was it not all the more so from their lack of interest in making it a little better—on the score of cleanliness, for instance?

That strident, unmitigated harshness of the Arabs here! A sort of assertive animosity seemed to come out of the very ground, as I turned this way and that to escape the filth and the smell, the gaping, nudging boys, the raggedness and dirt of everything, everywhere. A baptism of horror . . . There must be compensations, no doubt, but the town itself was entirely depressing.

How could you have stayed here so long, returned so often?

More out of *Fountains in the Sand*: "*That witchery of Orientalism,*" (a good line to start today with!) . . . "*It exists, chiefly, for the delectation of hyperborean dreamers. The desert life and those many-tinted, mouldering cities have their charms, but the misery at intermediate places like Gafsa (and there are hundreds of them) is too great, too irremediable to be otherwise than an eyesore.*"

"*Intermediate*", Gafsa? It appeared to me ultimate, in its way, *un-surpassable*. And as the day wore on . . . *How soon* could we get out of it? I swore to you I would curb my exclamations about "rags and hunger" if we could have just a little less of them *all concentrated*, such as here.

"But the oasis! My dear, you've forgotten the oasis!"

I had, at that moment. And duly ashamed of my impetuosity, I realised it would be the first time I walked in an oasis—a most beautiful and gracious thing, as was now apparent. This one made one forget the dust and dirt and litter, the awful aspect of those Arab and Jewish "laundry pools", the vegetable sewage, the begging hands and the surly, angry tempo of everything "up above". For the oasis is deep down, in a sort of bowl or winding ravine. Delicious to the eye were the clustering trees and shrubs, the bushes and rich vegetation, green upon green in contrast—

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as were the neat garden-plots, so well worked over, with their luscious tomatoes and lettuces. The smell? Bah! That is only the particular nature of the water. Look rather at those smiling lads and men at work! They seem a different people to those "up above". Or, maybe, as soon as inside an oasis, a being comes under some kind of spell and is calmed and soothed while his problems fade temporarily from mind? Rather a fanciful thought, yet I was delighted with it . . . *Of course* we must stay in Gafsa as long as you liked! There was also the Meda Hill, the Kasbah, and the desert itself; we should certainly wander about slowly and see all of these things at leisure.

I seem to remember more annoyance over our meals here—a particular reek imbued everything in the unimaginative cooking. It was no longer "all grease"; the unpleasantness was more abstract and indefinable. Some innate characteristic of the water? The "soul" of the water has this peculiar tang in the sand-surrounded towns—is that it? Yet nothing could be finer than those luxuriant tomatoes, those vivid lettuces growing out of the dust-laden ooze "down there". "Oasis-ooze—Oh see what it produces!" I cried to you in admiration.

"That's because *everything drains down into it.*"

Did it matter, after all? We should probably not be poisoned.

On the other hand—that lavatory, of which I complained to you with such anger. It was a sort of tiny shrine on a dais where six or seven steps had to be ascended and peculiar acrobatics performed on top, because all of the proportions of the thing were wrong. The whole of it was caricatural, meant to make one laugh. Yet, as it was the only one in the hotel, the ultra-complication made one indignant instead—a shrine to the glory of perversity.

"*Very inconvenient. And very bad too* for the second peristaltic movement . . .", you agreed with me.

Meanwhile all those ghastly Arab boys were waiting for us outside—waiting.

"It's simply because they've nothing whatever to do. And we seem to be *an attraction*. Now just notice; they don't even beg.

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Has one of them asked you for money? They don't want our money; they just want company."

"But Norman, we simply *can't* go about all day surrounded by this horde. Look at their faces—except that little dark one, maybe. Thugs! Shaping for crime!"

They would collect outside our hotel by seven in the morning to wait until we should issue at ten or so, and then pester us with their nudging, grinning, mumbling propinquity. They had no talk with us. Could they even speak French? "Order them to go away and not dare come near us again!" I remonstrated with the imbecile hotel-clerk, who merely shrugged his shoulders. We ourselves had told the boys to leave us alone, in vain.

"Norman! For God's sake think of something to drive them away. This is the fifth session of it! We can't even walk in the desert without this maddening troupe. How many are there? Eight of them today! They are driving me crazy. Shall we try giving them a few francs to be off?"

"Not on your life! Then they *will* begin asking for money, and they'll bring all their friends with them for more!"

There was an instant's respite when you sent a couple of them to buy me two "native" cotton handkerchiefs (made in France), the other six having found something else to do at that moment. But they were soon all back.

A great, lengthy sunset was beginning and to the desert we went—with our troupe. They had started quarrelling loudly and violently, and I hoped they would come to blows and get severely hurt and all be knocked out for days and days. But nothing of the kind happened.

"Do *you* like their presence?" it occurred to me to ask you.

"Certainly not! But you see, they've simply nothing to do. It's company they want."

"I swear they are so odious that I would go and fetch the military or the police, if I knew where to find them! I can't bear this a moment longer. It is ruining everything. I want to look at the desert in peace!"

A brilliant idea now came to you:

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"We must take one of them, just *one*. And he can think he is being our guide. Then he will drive the others away. You'll see if he doesn't! Come here, you . . ."

That did it. Lightly rewarded for his "guiding", "You" seemed a perfect dear, and all was now simple. We would have "You" the rest of the time in Gafsa and no one else should attempt to come near us. It worked!

One way of avoiding the boys before the discovery of this strategy was a cab, and not the boys alone but the irritations of Gafsa. For lo! a mere three miles away is that exquisite little oasis of Leila, where no French was spoken—or so it seemed—where, presumably no foreigners lived and perhaps not so many tourists came. The contrast of this darling place with how much else around! Its people looked clean and healthy, no children begged or importuned, and that feeling of murky oppression-depression which was rotting Gafsa to the core, was entirely lacking here. As primitive as could be, Leila. That day a bridge was being made with hardly any tools, practically with bare hands. And was it not here that we saw a perfect instance of what the safety-pin could do for the women of Islam, if they could be induced to use one? "Oh for a safety-pin!" had been your exclamation long years ago in such places on such occasions, and now, watching one at her work it broke from you anew! For here was a woman, draped and shrouded in her veils, holding together all this complication with one hand while she attempted to wash various clothes in the muddy waters of the *oued* with the other. How could it be that the safety-pin had not reached Leila? Or was the use of it, for some reason, against the laws of Islam?

We found the same gentle feeling of leisure and remoteness at Sidi Ahmed Zarroung, a saintly spot nearby named after a *marabout*, his shimmering white shrine visible from afar, a holy pearl of Allah against the happy, swishing green of a few palm-trees. These were brief pleasures, a mere couple of hours away from urbanism, to which we returned with a crack—as when that Arab lout who drove the tottering pair of long-starved horses broke his whip across them in one last ugly flourish.

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Of the Kasbah I remember its handsome, theatrical proportions—just what an old fortress should be: solid, yet rather fairy-like and romantic-looking. Suddenly a new lot of children appeared and so different were they to those boys that we began talking to them and they to us, in French. They said with awe that the whole place was full of arms. "Never so many as now," On the Meda Hill we wandered, you with your stick poking over a few stones. A place, I thought, which must demand much concentration of eye for a find to be made, for its surface seemed unpromising and confusing. Yet how many a specimen of worked flint—and even of "pre-Chellean skull-cleavers"—you had picked up here in your stone-collecting days.

The end of our time in Gafsa was pleasant, guided about in the desert by "You"—a gentle *à trois* with this silent little boy who looked at "M'sieu" with reverence and affection as you said a few words to him in French which he seemed to understand but to be shy about speaking. There must have been other impressions of the place, but they are gone now. The persistent and happy one is a composite of several sunsets—you and I and "You" strolling silently and thoughtfully in that sandy wilderness.

After those five Gafsan days we were off—in the usual closed car—towards Tozeur. And now phosphates came into the picture, as we passed two immensely long truck trains transporting these fundamental riches of Tunisia. I seemed unable to answer my question: "What exactly *are* phosphates?"

Discovered in 1885 by Philippe Thomas just three years after France took over the country . . . Company shares soaring in value . . . Tunisian, Algerian, Moroccan workers paid a mere 12 francs a day (about 1/2) for the arduous work of extracting them by digging near Metlaoui . . . I knew this. And that the Compagnie des Phosphates owned the whole of that town and had a special railway to the mines. That it had deflected a spring at the top of the Seldja Gorge, some eight miles away, leaving the Arabs there without water . . . That the prosperity of Sfax, large port

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and second largest town in Tunisia, is due to phosphates . . . But what, exactly *are* they?

As with coal, they are the long-past impressed into the service of the present—in the form of *fertilisers*.

I had not yet come to that charming description of them in *Fountains in the Sand*, which we turned to on the spot:

“ . . . Quintessential relics of those little Eocene fishes and other sea beasts, if such they were, that swam and crawled about the waters many years ago—piled up on terraces so high that the mind grows dizzy at contemplating their multitudes, or the ages required to squeeze them into this priceless powder; piled up for 500 miles along their old sea beach.”

“Don’t you think, Norman, that we might try and see something of those mines? I should *love* my mind to grow dizzy in the contemplation of the relics of these tiny Eoceneans!”

“What we *must* see,” you said firmly, “is the Seldja Gorge.”

Nothing could be more different to Gafsa than Tozeur (you had kept this dark from me!), the southernmost of the big oases, gently spread out, bathed in the light spring sun, positively *benign*. A sort of enormous village, I thought, until you informed me it had some 16,000 inhabitants, of whom a mere hundred were European. No maddening boys were here and no beggars, and, at moments, even no people at all in sight on those great bare camping-grounds that could easily hold many caravans at a time.

You remembered an excellent hotel—a small, not the *de luxe* one—to which we went and where the food was food again, for it was French and French alone. And soon we were in the oasis, that eight-mile belt with its 350 springs—full of the chanting of men and boys working their garden-plots during the whole of our ten days here.

We talked much of this adorable phenomenon, the oasis—of the amazing occurrence it is in vast, desertic regions, of which, to be sure, Tunisia itself is not so very large a part. Two worlds

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exist side by side in Tozeur: all of this wonderful green with water running through it, and all of that equally wonderful pale sand, where, if you but walk a mile or two into the flat part of the desert, you are encompassed by sheer space—as “abstract”, I suppose, as anything on earth can be, with no feature of any kind—nor nature, nor humanity, nor even the sense of time.

While the oasis is a slow poem of gentleness, it is also protective! One's feet effortless along the light sandy paths, one's eyes lost in entrancement at the feathery wealth of palms and softly-waving branches and at the sudden scarlet or yellow in the little gardens, a sensation comes that nothing sudden or violent could happen “in here”. One is cupped, hidden, enclosed, encircled and safe from the vastness of “outside”, with its sand-tracks merging into infinity. Would that sense of infinity become perplexing? “Outside” made me feel as if in the centre of a huge zero, from the edges of which—as you told me—the *tabias*, those stout palm-leaf screens, have often vanished, covered over by the drifting sand. One can get lost in either of these contrasts, indeed yes.

Such was not our intention. Every day in the oasis you remembered a path one way, and another, that. Ah, this one leads to an *oued*, a large, muddy stream. Here it is! And an Arab woman crouched beside it today, washing and bleaching wool, a Bedouin woman, unveiled, who smiled at us. And along there is the part called “Paradise”.

“They are marrying the palms,” you told me another day as we sauntered through the luxuriance of fig, pomegranate and date trees filled with innumerable birds and colours, “that's what that man is after up there in the palm. Some work! He ties a sprig of the male bloom inside the female bloom. All done by hand, on thousands and thousands of trees. We've come at the right time for this.”

With wonderful courtesy a little further on, an Arab gardener hailed us, came down from his tree, climbed another kind of

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palm, removed the "tapping cup" from the cleft made at the very top to catch the rising liquid, descended and offered us some of it in a small bowl—Palm Wine in its first stage. It was raw and salty, as if uncertain yet of what it would become. But, properly fermented and matured, it is not to be taken as a joke—as my African Gold Coast friends had often explained, saying "By then it is almost champagne."

Soon Zriba came into our daily life, the best guide imaginable because he never bothered us by volunteering information of any kind but could answer all sorts of questions. This orthodox Moslem of great serenity contrived to tell us much from within the circle of his universe, which was encompassed by the very acceptable, but as yet unfulfilled, tenet that *tous les hommes sont frères*. When I asked him how he thought this might eventually be made to work, he merely smiled, repeating gently "Mahomet said . . ." And then he told us people were much less religious than before, more apt to think for themselves. It did not seem to shock him either. Ah, the past—in so many ways it was much better than today—for the Tunisian Arabs. As for the Bedouini, where were now their great flocks of 1,000 or more? Those we had met on the road had not over a hundred or even fifty sheep—was this not so?

Isabelle Eberhardt was often in our minds. With what difficulty you had borrowed that book of hers (out of print at that time) *Dans l'Ombre Chaude de l'Islam*, and we often read from it together. To her you gave the greatest praise I have ever heard come from you—that is, unreservedly. This young woman, Russian-born, brought up as a boy in Geneva, later a journalist, who found her spiritual home in Algeria, became a Mahommedan, married an Arab Spahi officer, and was drowned in 1904 at the age of twenty-seven in a suddenly-risen flood at Aïn Sefra—*how she could describe!* And how true she was to herself always! *Non-derivative*. With how few words she could evoke and put a truth. Things like "*The grave and beautiful gestures of the Moslem faith which ennoble the most ragged*".

Beautiful gestures too were those of the family of dark nomads

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that Zriba took me to see, encamped on the edge of the desert and to whom 5 francs ("You must not give more", said he) seemed quite a sum—for such is the poverty. Nothing but women were in this small, crazy tent, and two or three children. On the bare ground, a large wooden bowl, some kind of cook-pot, and an empty sack; an uneasy watch-dog outside. Their beautiful manners and their lovely smiles! One was a pure African of luxuriant dark skin, a Negro woman from "very very far away". They had all come—Zriba translated—from "Very far"—an admirable manner of describing distances in Africa. It suffices! Their men were out in the desert all day with the flocks, taking them to whatever patches bear some kind of sandy plant. And that long, emphatic sentence meant what? The woman who spoke for all said that sometimes they had nothing to give their men to take out for the day but a handful of dates. And those gestures were to show how they had scooped the rain-water out of the tent with their hands after yesterday's downpour. They were complaining very much, these wanderers, of the hardness of their lot; and yet they were rather hesitant about accepting the five francs. Wanderers—dressed in those flowing dark-blue hand-woven draperies, torn and patched, but with massive old silver bracelets and brooches glistening in the folds. A terribly poor little tent, yet tended withal. Zriba and I agreed that tidiness depends on character.

There were not many Europeans about, yet we had a little casual conversation with one or two and I could see your silent amusement as the old theme was developed in the "approved" way:

"Bah—these nomads, Bedouini and Gourbi-dwellers . . . What would they do with any kind of proper domicile if you were to give them one? Nothing! They'd refuse to live in it!"

Maybe, considering they are wanderers by choice. Yet no one would succeed in making either of us believe that such rank poverty as now was the intention of the first Bedouini of all! How much in the whole Tunisian perspective was known to you, and new to me.

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And suddenly one morning we came upon a perfectly clean and even prosperous-looking *gourbi*, the only one of that kind we saw during the whole of our journey. Work was going on happily here, in contrast with the usual forlornness of such places—*gourbis* made out of crazy old tin cans, strips of iron, lumps of mud, broken sticks and rags and shards—a filthy blot on whatever piece of land they spring up on, their inhabitants moping in dirty tatters around the hideous conglomerate—their home. The making of burnous cloth was in process here, the desert-women using their fingers as combs alongside of those antediluvian objects they handled so deftly, actually chattering and laughing as they shuttled the material from one side to the other on their looms. A rare sound in Tunisia, laughter! Too many people all bent and bowed, shuffling and lop-sided, looking as if they were unable to stand upright . . . How well you had epitomised these traits in the Arab picture: "*They are merely depressed; they are not deficient in mother-wit or kindness; a little good food would work wonders.*"

I wrote a good deal every day, in this atmosphere of balm and leisure, to which spring came as we strolled and sat about in the oasis of an afternoon. The temperature was perfect for walks in the desert—to the Kaabi Spring, for one, to those strange large rocks there made out of clay. Here we found four little Negro boys in red fezes, some Arab children too, and as we clambered about and sat with them on top facing a great sunset, the same old Arab lilt that travelled centuries ago to Spain and has remained there came up, it seemed, out of the very ground, yet far, far away.

Not the least of my small pleasures in this kindly oasis-town was the moment with the rare dung-beetle—had you but been with me at that moment you could have told whether it be really rare or no, and doubtless have given me its name. It was high noon on the sheer, empty sand-stretch with nothing whatever in sight—hardly visible even, as it passed, was that aeroplane way up above me and the round, black scarab. The beetle stood on its

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head, rolling the disproportionately large ball it had made and laid its egg in, rapidly digging a hole and pushing it within for the sun to hatch; then, putting a last finishing claw to these fascinating manœuvres, was off into immensity.

I blessed you for Tozeur—for my many walks and talks with Zriba who took me to see Arab families, and the French school, and gave me much to think and write about in my articles. You too found Tozeur the best of places—a comfortable hotel, excellent food, moderate rates, good service . . . Good service—well!

It was one evening just before dinner and I in my room about to come down. The knock on the door revealed our young waiter, an Arab of seventeen or so, rather gangling and absent-minded, whose entire head at that moment was swathed in an all-enveloping white bandage. He had never bothered before to come and say dinner was ready, and now seemed at grips with some perplexity or other as he stood hemming and hawing. Suddenly the words came to him in French in a large, moonlike smile:

“Are you the wife of Monsieur?”

“No. Just an old friend, a great friend. Why?”

It seemed an odd question, for he had never talked to me about anything before, except, perhaps, about the wonderful tomatoes here.

At this he hemmed and hawed again, then with a yet more ingenuous smile, asked me point blank:

“Would you like to make love with me?”

“I would not,” said I. “And how come you to ask such a curious question? Don’t you think—for one—that I am old enough to be your mother?”

“That’s no matter,” said he, “no matter at all. *Faire l’amour, ça, toujours bon!*”

And then he bowed himself vaguely out of the room and was soon serving us dinner.

You were delighted when I told you about this:

“No, it’s not surprising—ha! These young Arabs get all sorts of ideas. Maybe he thought it would please you. *Toujours bon, indeed!*”

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It also recalled one of the ideas that had come to another Arab youth—years and years ago—when you were in this very hotel and he most anxious to please you. He had noticed how much you seemed to like being with the children at times, talking and walking with them and giving them sweets and so on, children of all ages—and how much they liked you, big and small.

“One evening,” you said, “that very window opened and an arm came in. At the end of it was a baby, a baby two or three years old, which was gently deposited on the floor *without a word* . . . That boy told me later his idea was that I might like to play with his little sister . . .”

What else did we do in Tozeur? There was an expedition by car to the Seldja Gorge and it gave me yet another idea of the diversity of the desert. Everything is “the desert” hereabouts—flat and rock-filled, humpy and embossed; part of it, even, are those great hills as one approaches Seldja—a lowering, wild, arid, sort of pass, dramatic and exciting. *Too* exciting by far, you remembered, on that occasion when you were walking in the long, narrow tunnel along the line and heard the train enter it behind you. Pitch dark! And a single track. Luckily, luckily, what should you encounter in the nick of time but a small recess in the wall . . . the awful monster had passed, so there was no nonsense about any “suicide of an Englishmen” later on.

My mind that day was on the remains of the Eocene fishes and the whole complex of phosphates, mining, and Arab workers, and I much wanted to see Metlaoui nearby. No doubt a visit would have involved endless formalities beforehand. Well, as for Arabs with machinery, what more could I want than this, which, you informed me, was “perfectly usual”? Here was our battered old car about to boil over, but luckily a muddy pool right to hand. The Arab youth by the driver would get some water out of it for the radiator. No receptacle? What of that? Off came his *fez*, and after the necessary amount poured into the car, on with it again, all wet and mud-filled, a-top of a loonish, smiling face.

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We had not, so far, come across anything like "the old colonial type". It was in the oasis of Nefta that we met him—a classic of all that has been said and written about such personages. Exquisite is Nefta!—about an hour's drive from Tozeur, less large but with rather the same atmosphere. Here you had stayed and written that long and admirable essay on Isabelle Eberhardt and Marie Bashkirtseff in 1911, "Intellectual Nomadism". Here too is an agreeable hotel, a well-appointed court in the centre of it; in all, a pleasantly-graded balance between things Arab and French. Not thus, however, was Monsieur!

To him—(I connect him with that hotel but maybe he was one of the other regular inhabitants of Nefta)—to him all Arabs were absolute savages.

"Why look," said he, enchanted at having us for an audience, "look at what they do! Put a new tap on the public fountain here and they knock it off forthwith! They break and destroy. Their own Mohammed has said: 'Where the Arabs pass comes destruction'. Curse modernity! Nowadays Arab women smoke; yes, *smoke*! I am a retired official and I know them, the Arabs. These new ideas in France are criminal. They will disrupt native life. As for unemployment . . . Nonsense! It's because they won't work. One has to live here for forty years, like myself, to know how to treat them. Make yourself respected. Force! Otherwise they despise you."

He regaled us with three long stories of the dreadful consequences of mixing the races—that is to say, of marriages between European women and Arab men, showing that such relations end in disaster. Of the other way round, not a word. But the other way round—the Arab woman and the European man—is a far rarer occurrence, I take it, to be encompassed within the wedding ring?

Many indeed are the different ingredients that come into a journey. I think we would have done well had we settled in Tozeur for about six months! Alas, that was impossible. You talked to me a little about the advisability or no of going back to Florence, whence the lawyer was writing that things were now being

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satisfactorily settled. And yet—no. The atmosphere was too disagreeable there. So, *pazienza!*

For myself, I could see how Tunisia would take a hold of one. But we were on the move. Where next? To Gabès, on the sea.

I wonder now if I ever told you how, when, about six years old, my thoughts began to be drawn towards Africa, and particularly towards the Sahara? Surely I was being taught as much about El Dorado and the North Pole? But there it was: the Desert. The sand, the dunes, the huge spaces, mirages, heat and parchedness—I seemed able to visualise all of this. Of such were filled several dreams, culminating in the great nightmare in which I wandered, repeatedly, the whole of one agonising night, escaping through a series of tents somewhere in the Sahara. Later came extraordinary dreams about black Africa—"The Dark Continent"—with Africans dancing and drumming around me, and I one of them, though still white, knowing, mysteriously enough, how to dance in their own manner. Everything was full of movement in these dreams; it was that which enabled me to escape in the end, going further, even further! And all of it was a mixture of apprehension that sometimes turned into joy, and even rapture.

And now, for years, before ever going to North Africa, to those parts of Morocco and Algeria I had visited before our own journey, such dreams seemed transferred to another plane. I saw the desert in a sort of mental vision, almost photographically. But which desert? It seemed that I should recognise it the day I found myself there. And the vision went something like this:

A flat, featureless territory of sand, of sand *only*, belonging to spirits and *effrits*—Great stretches of sand ruffled with puffs and gusts and blasts of fever-wind. Electricity is in the sky and *accidiaes* are about, apt to be manifest at any moment. Not to be seen, their presence will be *felt*! Are not they the spirits of noon and the middle hours of heat?—These and other spirits unpredictable, unassuageable by any sacrifice or compromise, wicked and wilful, invisible and teasing—none the less dangerous and even death-deal-

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ing for all the whimsicality of their natures. Tunisia, Tripolitania, Lybia—in which of these might be the spot where something wild and inexplicable would be going on, independently of human beings—until they were drawn into it? Something like a demoniacal ballet, part of which could only sardonically be called “Fun with a Tent”!

All of it is completely mysterious and continues like this:

A man is asleep in there, or even a whole company of people. And suddenly . . . away with the tent-roof in a whirl of sand, a blast of hot air, a gale of sound that resembles laughter! Presences swirl in the sky, although nothing is recognisably visible. Ah! That was a wisp, a trail of something up there? T’is gone! The tent too is gone now, the whole of it, with the next stroke. The poor mortals, buffeted by such wild and rapid manifestations, remain groping in darkness. Noon has gone black. As you see, natural laws are no more. Is this strange occurrence a sign, or a warning? Those spirits—are they angry, or having their fun with us? What do they want us to do? Go away? Where to? And who are they—can we come to terms with them? What is to happen next?

All of this—I vaguely think—may be connected with haschish—yet I know nothing of haschish. Nor do I know aught of the mysteries of *effrits* and *accidiaes*.

Now, here in the deserts of Southern Tunisia, the memory of the vision came back to me. There might, just might be some place and some moment with it (a conjunction of things intangible was obviously essential) that would make me exclaim: “*This* is one of those regions!” But no. It may be in Lybia where there is yet more sand, yet less people, or deep in the Sahara itself. Possibly something might be evoked by the Chott Djerid that we were to cross in a car to Gabès. It sounded rather that kind of place. Or indeed, the Chott might throw out some wild mysteries of its own.

We set off after lunch in ordinary enough mood and, although

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I thought of my vision, it soon went away, for there was nothing remotely in harmony with it in this part of the calm desert, plumped-out with tufts and hillocks, pitted with small depressions, a lone path wandering off, seldom trodden, into further immensity. Presently we saw a sort of shimmer ahead. Could that be a mirage? Not at all. It was the Chott Djerid itself, that great salty depression, aureoled with fables of antiquity—part of which is dry and part of which is water—from which, incidentally, the French Government extracts some 100,000 tons of salt every year! Not from just here, though. Nor man nor workings of any kind were in sight.

The road now became a well-defined track, the old camel-track of antiquity, set about on each side with posts that ran on—disappearing into space, and a gigantic flat stretch lay before us. Everything else was left behind; we were alone with the Chott, on its great dusty-sandy bosom. Yet there was water somewhere ahead, for the shimmer had reached us just now. A little further and there it was: water. Our track ran straight across it; the gentle, cloudy pale mass lay very close on both sides—a vast lagoon.

And now the track was even partly submerged . . .

A slight skid . . . What had happened? We were right off it; one of the back wheels was sinking gently into the water, and there it remained, immovable. Some churning and steering followed and we looked at each other sadly: if this was already happening at the start, did it not seem probable the Chott could not be crossed today? We should have to turn back . . . *Turn back?* Suddenly we realised that was not the point. It was “get out” that had to be attended to at once. We sprang from the car and were half way up to our knees in water. The driver was cursing, the Arab boy with him looked scared . . .

“If the wind *really* blows from the sea”, you remarked forthwith, “if it blows harder than now, the sea *may* come in all over here, and deep too!”

‘Well’ I thought, as it was borne upon me that we really were in a situation, ‘can *this* come to be the manner of one’s death? By

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N.D. with Arab boys at Kaabi Spring



Marooned in the Chott Djerid

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drowning in a great, beautiful expanse of unexpected, unpredictable water on dry land in Tunisia? Of *my* death . . . of *our* death, indeed, together—for it is more likely than not that what happens to one will happen to the other as well! No—to four of us, for there is also the chauffeur; there is also that loon, that idiot who had just put the spanner down on the ground, forgetting in his excitement that the ground is under water up to the elbow at least and so cloudy that he will be unable to find it again . . .’ Sure enough there he was, having realised his mistake, already groping about. The Belgian driver had some merry words to say to him. You and I had been nearly as foolish—although that would not affect the extraction of the car. We were so startled at finding ourselves in all of this flood that we had stepped into it fully shod. How can we not have thought of removing our shoes, which would be ruined? This must be one of the saltiest pieces of water in the world, for immediately our legs were encased in shimmering crystals.

Not consternation exactly . . . my feelings were somewhat mixed. Not consternation, but interest and perplexity combined, which culminated into a growing malaise. If this had to go on for hours, surely we could walk back to dry land: I mean, we could save our lives that way—if it came to that?

“Don’t you be too sure, my dear. If the wind blows *harder* . . . Besides, you’ve forgotten how far we’ve come with the water all round the track already!”

“But it’s all quite shallow, and it was all quite flat just behind—or so it seemed?”

“Don’t you be too sure. Besides, do you see anything left of dry ground in the direction we came from? *I* don’t! And you forget the water is rising, *slightly* rising all the time.”

Perfectly true. Shallow as we knew it to be, all was now submerged, almost every yard.

“If that wind blows harder, as indeed it may do—quite hard, quite soon—from the sea, then the sea will come in—fast. There’s nothing to stop it. The driver should have known! But no! Some people are so pig-headed you can’t tell them anything. *I* have

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been here before—though not like this, ha! I know what the Chott Djerid can do!”

At this we were both silent a while and I noticed there was a small object in view. A little way back about two feet of ground remained, casually unsubmerged. On this tiny space, a swallow! And of course it was not just resting, poor mite; it lay there, dead. A dead swallow and a regiment of widely-spaced posts careering off with a curve into infinity—of such the whole panorama, now a lagoon, or even part of the Sea. Ah, yes, some vague mountains very many miles behind us in a haze.

“I don’t know what *you’re* going to do, but *I’m* going to have a drink of whisky every half hour as long as this goes on—exactly every half hour. Here you are!”—you said suddenly, extracting a large, unsuspected flask from an inner pocket and offering me first go. Out came your watch.

“Four-thirty. The next one at five.”

“Don’t move, don’t move, Norman! I am going to take a photo. Two, in fact. This must go on record!”

Now I began thinking about the map—surely we must have got it out, or was it inadvisable to move anything in that car so thoroughly marooned? In any case, I remembered the map.

“But, Norman, the Chott does not connect directly with the Sea, or even indirectly so, on the map. It lies some way off, the Sea; there’s dry land in between.”

“Maps are often wrong! You can’t map a country like this properly. Just try! Nobody knows where the water ends or where it begins, and *when*. That’s the point, *when*. At some seasons the whole of this may be entirely dry. And at others, entirely under water. And sometimes—what about today?”

The chauffeur worked on, tugging and straining, but the tool had not been recovered, and without it the wheel could not be cranked up; while the water was now slightly, yet definitely, deeper. Nor was there anything we seemed able to do to help him.

What was left but to muse about the Chott? I liked it very much indeed—apart from the possible danger of having to die in

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it. I would come back here one day, if life were spared. Would the Chott take this into account, accepting my feeling as a small tribute?

"Five o'clock. Here you are, Nancy!"

We had another good swig.

Now, merely at the end of April, it seemed as if it would soon get slightly cold, if not more than slightly. And we with our feet in the water—warm up till now.

"That sun looks as if it were going to set soon . . ."

We stood about. Could we not really help the driver? No! He would not hear of it. By now the tool had been found but the wheel kept slipping back into the groove, churning it deeper yet.

How high were these pretty ripples? To my knee, but not higher. They might stay at that point for a good half hour more?

"We shan't manage Gabès today, my dear. If that idiot thinks he's going to get me into his cab again and drive on in the direction of Gabès across all of this water . . ."

This was stupefying. What, after all this?

"But it's out of the question, Norman! He can't do anything but back for yards and yards before turning, if he ever gets on to the track again. Then he can turn and we'll go back to Tozeur—only about three hours!"

"And pitch-dark by then, and long before then, too. He's just told me he *thinks* he can still drive along the track . . . that the water won't get any deeper towards Gabès. Not on your life! The pig-headedness of some people . . ."

Meanwhile the car continued in its luckless *status quo*. Having gone to have another look at that curiously still unsubmerged dead swallow, I had missed some smart repartees between you and this obstinate man.

"Here you are—5.30." This time it came as a cordial.

And it *was* getting cold. Would the whisky hold out? Why had I not always a good flask on me too? And darkness beginning . . . Enough of this now, enough, enough! At which, or between which particular whisky-time would it end?

I think we had one more, the 6 o'clock one. It was about then

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that the wheel was raised and some careful manœuvring set the car back on the track. One final look, one last measuring . . . Exactly up to my knee were the darkling waters, the gentle ripples, now quite cold.

“Back to Tozeur!” we commanded. The driver was in a rage—how the Chott had not got into his engine is a miracle. He had “lost three hours with us!” And his fury was manifest in terrifying speeding. Across a pitch-dark gulley, a log within it or a great stone . . . our heads hit the roof; a little harder and we should have been badly hurt. But nothing could spoil your good humour. Quite an adventure, eh? We might have ended our days in the Chott, instead of being on the road to . . .

What was this? *Not* on the road back to Tozeur? Why on the road to Gafsa instead? Furiously we remonstrated, receiving the firm reply that it was “much better that way”; that we should “get to Gabès easily tomorrow, *from Gafsa*.”*

We did indeed. So easily that I have not the vaguest recollection of how we went. By car? By train? We arrived in daylight sufficient to feel disappointed at the aspect of this most un-Arab town on the sea, built mainly by convicts. Apart from those rows and rows of bathing-huts, the atmosphere was even rather like that of some nondescript French *sous-préfecture*. In all, it was very colonial and unprepossessing, despite its large oasis filled with things as diverse as wheat, tobacco and orange-trees. What did we come here for, in any case? Partly so that we could cross that phenomenon, the Chott Djerid, and partly so as to be able to go on to Matmata.

The Troglodytes—that is the whole point of Matmata—living here as they do in natural caves and recesses further enlarged by them in the inner flanks of several deep cavities in the ground. This was a place dear to you, and, looking back, perhaps it was the most authentically Arab spot we were in during the whole of

* It occurs to me *only now* that the driver may have thought we might want to try the Chott again with him tomorrow, if we went back to Tozeur.

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our journey. Quite different here was the atmosphere to that general feeling one has about the dual nature of Tunisia: Arab and super-imposed French. Untouched, apparently, by Europeanism and modernity, this seemed to belong to Islam without taint of colonisation. They were country Arabs here, nothing to do with the shuffling proletariat of the towns. It pleased you much to gaze into these deep holes, as if following some train of thought. And as we were saying how interesting all Tunisia must have been a thousand—or a hundred years ago (like so much else) there suddenly appeared the most beautiful child I have ever seen, a very illustration of “high antiquity”. It was a pure-blooded little Negro of ten or so, slim, statuesque and eternal, and—yes! draped in “all antiquity” as well—actually in two pieces of sacking. It was the way he had hung them about himself that made us exclaim aloud.

We were of the same mind, too, on the score of contemporary Tunisia: an affection for the country in all its contrasts and overlays of double civilisation comes to one a mere few days after arrival.

“Norman—this is how I feel about Tunisia: it seems as if it were waiting for something to bring it to life again—as if it were in a swoon. That is partly by nature, and partly by economics-cum-politics, of course. It is crying out for a renewal of strength, for some kind of live current to run through it anew! And I am not thinking in water-symbols . . .”

“There is a proverb that says ‘Throughout the centuries Tunisia has arisen five times from the sands’ . . .”

And as we went on talking in this strain you remembered the well-known saying:

“Algeria is a man; Tunisia, a woman; and Morocco, a lion.”

It would be a Moroccan who said that first . . .

To the large port of Sfax we went next in an excellent train from Gabès, one of the nicest trains I have ever been in—for which, we reminded each other, we have to thank the French. And here, after sitting up late on return to a town and its cafés,

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I somehow slept so little that something impelled me to get up early next morning and I was rewarded with a final "flash" of the nomads.

Our hotel was near the seashore and the beach suggested that a wonderful walk could be taken in the fresh hours of the day. I was on it by 7 a.m. One would not, I think, immediately connect such a stretch with the dumping of refuse, and yet, such a collection of different fishes' heads in decomposition would be difficult to reassemble. Further on came a "culinary" spread. And further yet was a great mound. A fresh breeze was blowing and I walked towards this, thinking it might be one of nature's strange dunes. Figures were jiggling up and down a-top—in Bedouin draperies, the wind told me—and as I approached they turned into two young women and three or four meagre youths. Busy, all as busy as could be. What might they be doing? Digging with their hands, a large sack beside them, into which they put whatever they were extracting. The mound, now identifiable, was a huge, dark refuse-pile, old and hard in places, oozing soft and fresh in others—in a state of permanent evolution. On the very top was one of the girls. The clear morning light held her immobilised for a moment, poised to perfection against the skyline. And now . . . Oh! My! Look! her gesture said, as with a howl of joy and a swoop betokening "reward", she held up in triumph what she had just come upon: a long, slime-covered, snake-like object—a liquifying bean-pod—then threw her head back and, opening her mouth, with a flourish flung the prize within.

I wished you could have seen this with me. Were you shocked at my being fascinated by anything so disgusting?

Not in the least. It evoked a chuckle, along with the staid words:

"My dear, there's always been poverty in the world—and there always will be."

"Egypt can match such a vision, I believe. Little children going through horses' droppings in the street, picking out pieces of undigested oats . . . Is this really possible, Norman?"

"I shouldn't doubt it!"

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Northern misery, Southern misery. At least here it is less cold, the weight of winter less lengthy. How can it all compare with pre-European times?

A little illustration of these—or so we thought—was afforded by another part of Sfax, for there the Arab artisans, grouped in their professions: metal workers, dyers and others, were employed in the same way they must have been since their wonderful crafts came into existence. How much we liked this thriving-looking quarter humming with activity. And such colours were here—such greens by such purples in the vats, such dyeing of wool, and steeping of wood, and happy hammering of copper.

From here we went to El Djem, a giant of the same shape as the Colosseum in Rome and even larger—if less known. It lies admirably, rising out of a great plain with innumerable stretches of finely-planted olives, and it seems to me you said some interesting things about this noble ruin. Once again: had I but taken notes! And not notes alone at El Djem—you may be sure—but on all sorts of occasions. I know how much this would have fussed you; it would, in fact, have been impossible. Alas for the evanescent beauty of spoken words—butterflies mostly—gone without return. “Built by the Romans”—I get no further with that colossus.

Sousse—We were now thoroughly back in urban life, and done, alas! with timeless desert and leisurely oasis. At moments in that southern part of Tunisia I remember feeling as if in a dream, and I have never seen you as you were then some of the time: rather silent, with a mellow expression on your face. This, I think, came from having found a region whose very nature and character could be called “leisure”.

Of Sousse I recall the magnificent ramparts and yet another great sunset as it spread out above those crenelated walls turning them to the colour of diluted copper and laying its admirable glow on everything as we wandered through the *souks*. But we were in Sfax and Sousse so short a time, only a night in each.

And as we drove through Hammamet by the sea you told me

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what a good place you had found it—for rest, comfort and pleasant atmosphere—a place to remember, you said, stopping the car so as to walk about a little here with whatever memories they were and which remained, however, not vouchsafed!

And then, all too soon, we were back in Tunis and our little journey almost over. To have seen the desert for the first time with you! Our days in the southern region in particular, left me, I now realised, with a sense of something acquired and of something promised—and what else could this be but the taste of the country . . . yet so particular a feeling as not to make sense in words. The promise was for the future. Should we ever come here again?

And when Maître Tahar, sounding me on the score of my impressions, seemed to epitomise it all in that succinct question: had I “seen”? (by which I knew he meant the magnitude of the poverty and depression) and I told him “Yes, I have seen all right!” I could not but add that I felt I had even *savoured* his country a little, and that it would be a wonderful thing to be here when it began to rise again, for the *sixth* time, from its sands.

We had been talking about Isabelle Eberhardt almost every day and I have just re-read those lines you wrote about her soon after that chance-encounter when a French artist, met in Gafsa in 1910, put two of her books (as yet unknown to you) into your hands. So it was not she who contributed to your first going to Tunisia, as I had thought at one moment; it was there, on the spot, that she came to you in the guise of her written words. Let me open your *Experiments* at “Intellectual Nomadism” and find some of those passages that are among my favourite among all of your writings. Yes, here:

“A critic has called Isabelle Eberhardt ‘the most virile and sincere writer of Algeria’ . . . In her early years, under the charge of an old grand-uncle at Geneva, she had been brought up ‘absolutely as a boy’. And now on horseback, alone and disguised as an Arab youth, she

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traversed the inner parts of Algeria and Tunisia from the borders of Morocco to those of Tripoli. These volumes (Dans l'Ombre Chaude de l'Islam and Notes de Route) are records of her journeyings, impressions of scenery interspersed with tales of native life and her own reflections; they unfold a vast and varied panorama—crumbling cities through whose narrow streets you stumble in twilight amid piles of foul refuse, calm Arab convent retreats where white-robed marabouts glide about like ghosts, the busy life of the green oasis gardens. Anon you are riding under a fiery sun through some gorge of scintillating rock or reposing awhile with the eternal wanderers in their black tents perched on a weltering desolation of sand-dunes . . .

“Her nature being essentially Russian, she can sympathise to an exceptional degree with the nomadic Arabs. For your Russian, unbeknown to himself, has still much of the nomad in him . . . She has what she calls the ‘goût de l'espace’—the ‘volupté profonde de la vie errante.’”

And this, as a piece of wonderful analytical criticism of creative writing:

“Now whoever looks in these pages for photographic reproduction of desert life will be disappointed. There is mirage hanging about them; like all artists, she detects colours and shapes invisible to the common eye; or, again, she is deliberately blind; her pictures of this ‘Holy land of Africa’ are distortions in the sense of Turner’s landscapes: distortions, that is, till we have risen to her point of view and learned to know better. She well knows the uses of that focussing or intensifying faculty which constitutes much of the charm of writers as different as Balzac and George Borrow. In this land of ‘menacing monotony’, the artistic mind dwells lovingly upon the minutiae of human affairs, the result being a magnified visualisation. The Arabs of Isabelle are so vital and palpitating that your ordinary ones melt away like phantoms. Elsewhere we are reminded of the aerial butterfly-touch of Hearn; of Maeterlinck’s love of pictured metaphor.”

And a fine thought about the desert:

“The Sahara used to exist only in its terrifying aspects of desolation and heat and thirst.

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“Then came a generation of men who discovered for us its manifold beauties; this, we said, was the truth and the whole truth, at last: the desert as a mode of art! And now we have Isabelle Eberhardt to whom the desert is no longer a mode of art, but a mode of life. (The Alps have passed through the same three stages.)”

These passages bring back my nostalgia of that moment, for soon we should be reft apart and I had become so attached to you in the light of a constant companion! Should we ever take such a little journey again?

Our return to France, from Bizerta to Marseilles, was placid and uneventful, with a glimpse at sea of Sardinia, which caused you to remark that, whatever one felt about D. H. Lawrence in most ways, there was one thing he excelled at—descriptions of scenery and places, in *Sea and Sardinia* for one.

It was odious leaving you, in Marseilles, and in a particularly abrupt manner, at that, our trains going in different directions and little time to spare. You just waved your stick at me: “Well, ta-ta, my dear, ta-ta!”

How long had our little journey lasted? Just under a month.

Dear Norman—at times you were as sudden as life:

“Here’s the corner . . . around we go . . .”

(A note here: we differ in two small points concerning that moment in the Chott Djerid. Because, although you wrote subsequently in *Late Harvest* that our driver would hardly have extricated the car without our help, I remember how our immediate offers of aid were angrily turned down. And it was to Gafsa he insisted on taking us, not back to Tozeur.)

3

Wartime and After

NOW how and where did we next meet?

On return to France I went immediately to another session of the League of Nations, where the case this time was Spain; and then home after finding, in Paris, Narcisa—a Spanish refugee whose husband had disappeared in the massacres of Badajoz. She came to live with me at Réanville and helped me much with Spanish. What rich and complicated *bacalao* dishes she would cook, of which she made you a particularly fine one later on.

Suddenly you were there!—appearing unannounced in the middle of a lush, green June or July afternoon, with a tall, florid good-looking young American:

“Here we are again! And this is Hutch, my dear. He’s only *just* come over from America, and he says he’s *just* going back, too. I wish I could induce him to stay . . .”

Many people were going to see you in Etretat that summer: Orioli and Dr Levy and Stella Churchill and Susan Palmer and your son Archie, and Eric, from Nairobi. Probably others yet. You seemed to be bearing the separation from Florence fairly well.

“Hutch”—Frank Hutchinson—was a brilliant engineering expert from Berkeley, California, and, although quite a new friend, an old admirer of your writings, all of which he possessed. “Up

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and over'', right on the spur of the moment, was the way he had come, with the intention of meeting you at last and telling you of his admiration. This unexpected arrival and Hutch's spontaneous personality brought a gratifying breeze into my little *clos normand*.

You had thought of bringing a good bottle of champagne with you from Etretat that day and we drank it slowly, sitting under my linden trees by the well. So this was Réanville, the house called "Puits Carré"! And what was *that* curious little building up there on the slope? The one-time Printing-Press, the HOURS—the tiny, converted stable where, years ago now, *One Day* had been carefully raised. Narcisa, despite her total lack of English, was much struck by you, telling me later that you were, obviously, "a great man". She could read that, she said, in your eyes most of all, although of course the whole manner of you indicated the fact.

Hutch and I went into the house for a moment so that I could show him The Hours Press books—was it not to him I gave my last available copy of *Pumice*? And there, sitting on the floor by the shelves, he looked at me hard and said:

"Any length of journey with Norman at the end of it! What a personality! As important to me as a scientist—I mean, his scientific writings are that—as a creative author. I had to meet him, just had to. And now I've got to get back to the States at once, so short is this vacation. But I'll be over again next summer to see him—if there's time."

What did that mean, "If there's time—if there's still time"?

What else but the possibility of war by then?

It seems to me we talked little of this under my lindens. You were in fine form, and . . . Dear me, yes! You certainly *would* come and spend a few days here soon.

"And then," said Narcisa, "Gervasito, my son, will see his first great writer from England."

For the moment she had lost him. No matter! Gervasito being a responsible boy of fourteen would soon send his address from whatever children's colony he was in. He would be the first

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Spanish child, you said, you would ever have met. By all means let him be here next month:

“*Leave it to me, my dear. I shall know how to talk to him, despite the difficulty of the language.*”

No difficulty, however, existed; for Gervasito, lively, wide-awake and already as manly as could be, had, we discovered, learned excellent French.

And so, a few weeks later—August 8, I see, from a book of yours then autographed—the four of us would be sitting lengthily of an evening around those trees. I remember these few days as bucolic—the wine let down into the well to cool, everything done in a leisurely fashion and in perfect temperature, the rich Spanish dishes made by Narcisa, our walks and strolls, and—as late as midnight—Gervasito’s strong young voice ringing out in the hot darkness, spiralling up and down Flamencos and new Republican songs, marching songs and those of the defence of Madrid. I think you were rather fascinated by him. In character he was very different from most Italian boys and he may have seemed slightly problematical? You got on famously together. And some time later told me you had an idea of going—of all places—to Goa! Did I think Narcisa would let you take Gervasito along? She was appalled at the thought. No, no, no! “*El Douglas*” was certainly a grand person, and a good one. But her son was all that was left her of the man she adored, of the country she had lost . . .

Soon after our few days at Réanville I went to Spain again, to Barcelona only this time, where everything could be summed up now by that terrible word “hunger”. It was, indeed, nigh-starvation—a fact that was getting to be understood, on account of the reiterated descriptions sent by journalists and various missions. A photograph I showed you later of some bombed buildings reminded you of the ghastly plight of people after the earthquake of Messina. What? With such hunger as I described, how could anyone be surprised at people rushing into the smoking

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ruins even before the arrival of the rescue-squads? Those houses were reputed to be store-places! It might shock some to hear of emaciated citizens hunting about for a few dried beans in the shambles among the dead, but it didn't astonish *you*:

"When people are driven to *real* starvation, they will even take to eating each other. *And we should be like them—ha!*"

I returned from Spain to Paris on a rainy, cold day in October—ill from the sudden change back to proper food, without a penny (it was Saturday, too, and the Banks shut), and scantily clothed, having felt I must leave everything possible to bombed-out people in Barcelona. Another touch of the friendliness that so often attends return lay in the fact that not one room was available in half a dozen hotels, the first of which expressed itself thus:

"Madame, all of your friends are here, where, I agree, you have lived lengthily. How could there be a room for you? There is Monsieur Douglas with two friends of his, and Monsieur Howard, and Monsieur Siepmann—all friends of yours, I repeat—and of course they are occupying the rooms, one of which, had things been otherwise, you might certainly have had yourself."

How I cursed you all at that moment! A hotel should be kept strictly to oneself, not generously indicated to others! And Paris seemed rather odd. How peculiar this absent-minded, worried look on the faces of those generally alert, change-counting people who were suddenly making slight arithmetical mistakes, saying *Ah, je n'ai pas ma tête aujourd'hui . . .* What was happening? I had seen no papers for forty-eight hours. Presently it became clear: the first day of "Munich week".

Soon enough I too felt I "had not my head today", and I remember nothing of what we did together. Many people grew flustered, and some hysterical, as the aerial journeys of the statesmen proceeded. Calm and detached were *you*, at any rate. A shake of the head, an angry, contained silence, or the muttered words: "A bad business". And as all the phantasmagoria of Munich week developed, rising to its peak and then collapsing

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into itself like a venomous soufflé, there was certainly not a touch of hysteria in you!

But back in Vence after this, "Auntie" noted some strong words of yours in one of her diaries which show how, despite your apparent detachedness . . .

"Norman is here . . . The Peace is not altogether to his liking. Peace with dishonour, he calls it. Norman wants Mussolini to be exterminated: 'Those two gangsters' as he calls Mussolini and Hitler, 'to be put on the spot'. We argued long and with much heat on this subject. How can anyone contemplate another war, I demanded, realising, as we must, just a little of what it will mean to the world, the unthinkable horror of it? N. is 70. At the best, he has only a few years of unsatisfactory existence to contemplate. 'I don't care about war,' he shouted; 'you talk about bloodshed and maiming. Do you realise how many are being done to death and mutilated in prison-camps in Germany and Italy? Their prisons won't hold the thousands they cram into them. New ones have to be built all the time'."

And now, suddenly, you seemed to pay more attention to my interest in Spain. As I was in London you wrote I must be sure to meet Stella Churchill and Susan Palmer who both realised the horror of the situation; and meet sympathetically we did. This is one of the times you and I were far apart, and now I come to think of it, maybe Munich week was the last occasion on which I saw you, until—the first outbursts and tragedies of war now being over—you arrived in London in 1942.

For me, that last winter of "Peace-in-our-Time" was spent entirely in writing articles and raising money for Spanish relief. My wish was to get back to Spain, and the *Manchester Guardian* agreed that I might go for them, paying my own expenses but duly accredited. Headed thus for the Cordoba front, events now came so fast that I had only reached Perpignan the day Barcelona fell. The refugees were starting to pour in over the frontier; the Préfecture carried out orders decided on long ago in such an eventuality. These were apparent to all in the attitude and deportment of the rancorous, fussy officials who made further,

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difficulties in a difficult enough situation. Franco was very near the border now and so imminent was the end that Perpignan became, all in a day, the hub of the world "from the news-angle".

Who would have thought the hand that wrote so detachedly: "Let them fight like Kilkenny cats if they like", just under two years ago, would now be sending me letters and even a telegram:

"Can I come to Perpignan and help?"

You had been forwarded some of my *Manchester Guardian* despatches and it was a most kindly impulse. But who could be helped? Officialdom saw to that. So inimical was it to the refugees that many a case that could have been dealt with by warm-hearted French people individually and in groups was prevented from even being approached. Everything got worse from day to day.

'Blessèd Norman', I thought, 'what *could* he accomplish here?'

For such, like that of the other two or three hundred journalists, was my day, every day of that cruel February:

Up at seven. On the road in a car by 8.30, or by train, to the frontiers at Le Perthus and Cerbère, and even to Bourg Madame in the snow. Over, on foot, several miles to the first Spanish village. Scenes of horror along the way. Questioning, noting, talking to hundreds of people in Spanish, memorising things to describe. Often no lunch, from lack of time. Back, come dark, to the unheated, freezing, dingy room in a horrible hotel where, by the worst light imaginable, exhausted and shivering, I would try to make consecutive sense in writing out of the facts and impressions of the day. The three or four-page airmail despatch then had to go off to the *Manchester Guardian*. The first real meal and rest came generally about 10 p.m., when, between mouthfuls, one would be discussing events with some of the other journalists. An occasional alternative was afforded by those hour-long waits in the crowded Préfecture, preliminary to obstinate arguings and pleadings with angry officials and the grudging stamping of permits. I did not think any of this would have appealed to you very much—although I should have loved to have seen you handling that very difficult *chef de cabinet* . . .

"I am perfectly ready to adopt a Spanish refugee child"—

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again and again you had said and now wrote me. But to set about such a thing is a full-time job—so is reporting—and when I raised the point with some French official or other, the answer came pat: “All too many such children are in France already. Your friend can take it upon himself to go and get one of those.”

Try you did, a little later, with Gustavo.

The way some things come about . . .

“I am Gustavo—ten years old, the son of Maria Eyguisquiaguirre. I was with her coming out of Spain and we got separated inside the tunnel between Port Bou and Cerbère when they stopped the train. It was I who had her bag, so I have her papers and your letters to her with your address. So I write to you. I do not know where she is nor how I can find her. Can you come and see me?”

Maria Eyguisquiaguirre, that typical Basque name . . . A tiny woman in black, a peasant, old before her time on account of the privations of war, her eyes raking the ground near the Port in Barcelona just after an air-raid. Had I seen the fish-man, she asked me suddenly, as I passed? Well, no, there was nothing to eat, nothing, save what kind people had sent from France, a tin now and then. I had given her my address and her letter, a few weeks later, telling of the hunger, had been photostated; I had made it the start of a food campaign, which collected hundreds and hundreds of pounds in England, thanks to the publicity given by the *Manchester Guardian*, *News Chronicle* and *Daily Herald*. And now there were half a million refugees scattered all over France and in concentration camps there. I, busy with my own Spanish refugee friends at Réanville; you in Vence . . .

Could any good come of your seeing Gustavo? In any case, across the whole breadth of the country you went, to St Céré, in the Lot. You wrote you had liked him very much—a dreadfully sad little boy, though. And—no. Gustavo seemed an enigma—possibly the only child to whose face you could not bring a smile: “He doesn’t want to come with me. He doesn’t *want* to be cheered up.” And I, who had also seen Gustavo by then, was

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not surprised, knowing how his mind was bound up with the fate of his country. But, years later, his short, prudently-written letters from within Spain once more ("I have had to do my military service . . . I have been long in a place from which I could not write you . . ."), always ended with "my respects to that wonderful friend of yours, *el señor Douglas*". Yes, ten years later.

Soon after this the nightmare began, the "*Drôle de Guerre*-Phoney War" period, with you still in Vence and myself in Normandy and in Paris, until, sick at heart and finding no sufficient field for my free-lancing, I decided to leave Europe and go with a Spanish refugee friend to Chile. We were not to see each other for an age, you and I. Nor did I know anything of your whereabouts while in South America, Mexico, the Antilles—by then trying furiously to get back to England because of the collapse of France.

"Gadding about like a mad dragon-fly" was the cheery phrase you shot at me in the first letter that got through the mist of distance and events. Had you but seen the difficulties I lived in for over a year while attempting to reach a place whence a boat might be sailing to some port in the United Kingdom, it seemed to me that, in lieu of this fallacious evocation, other words as ill-fitting might have come to you: "It all sounds like regular *masochism* to me!"

Maybe my going to Chile at the suggestion of Chilean and Spanish friends saved my life. Maybe I should have stayed in France, been interned, possibly shot, or taken the humiliating but necessary road to Bordeaux. Again and again I asked myself where you were after the Germans split the country in two. Till almost the end of my enforced peregrinations, created by the impossibility of getting back to Europe, I had no idea of your whereabouts. Nor, it seems, had anyone else.

The relief at hearing from Kenneth Macpherson was great, and I blessed him for having written:

Wartime and After

New York, Jan 26, 1941

"Dear Nancy,

The following has just appeared in the N.Y. Times:

"NORMAN DOUGLAS IS SAFE

British Author reached Portugal. Then sailed from there.

Norman Douglas, the British author, who was reported missing on the Continent after the war started, reached Portugal safely in recent weeks and sailed from there for an unknown destination, according to word received here (Washington) by Richard Aldington, also an author.

Mr Aldington said today that he received this word in a letter from Charles Prentice of the British publishing house Chatto and Windus, Mr Prentice, in turn, had been advised of Mr Douglas's safety by the latter's son, Archie Douglas.

An excerpt from the letter Mr Aldington received from Mr Prentice follows:

"Norman got into Switzerland and according to the last I had from Archie, had taken his passage from Portugal, but to where I know not".

I wondered, dear Nancy, if you'd had word? It would be wonderful if he turned up here, but I suppose he might be en route to South America. Perhaps he intends to look you up?"

The geography of this was confusing. Last heard of in Vence and in Antibes, it seemed peculiar, if not impossible, to have gone to Switzerland en route to Portugal. And then to have sailed from there—but whither?

As soon as I reached England in August at the end of my interminable manoeuvres, everyone knew you were still in Lisbon, and soon came news from you, forwarded on to me from Cuba:

Lisbon, 6 June, 1941

Dearest Nancy,

. . . They wanted me to go to the States and some years ago I would have gone with pleasure. Now I am simply too old and too

Letter to Norman

groggy. I have aged hideously since you saw me last, and am full of ailments, including that damned giddiness.

I feel sure the trip would polish me off—otherwise I should have gone, as there seems to be not much chance of my getting out of Lisbon at present. My passage was reserved and paid for in December—and there are still 80 people ahead of me, and some 700 others, waiting their chance to go to England, and many of them much more important than myself. A pretty tangle! Being born under Sagittarius I should not have listened to the advice of those who told me to leave Antibes. I think that was one of the major mistakes of my life, altho' conditions there are not very pleasant . . .

Here for the moment I am quite all right, staying with Neil Hogg of the Embassy, who goes out of his way to make me as comfortable as he can . . .

Dreadfully sorry to hear that your place has been knocked to bits, and all your precious things lost. Makes me quite sick. I have such pleasant memories of Puits Carré. It is absolutely disgusting and ignoble, but there is nothing to be done. "Pensate alla salute", as they say in Naples. I am not over-happy here; you may be sure of that. And our lovely trip in Tunis! When shall we meet again? . . .

Lisbon, 10 Oct, 1941

. . . Your saying that food is pretty plentiful does not impress me very much, knowing, as I do, that your appetite is that of a dyspeptic butterfly. But I am sure you are better off than at Antibes, where, I hear, people come to blows in the street over a fragment of putrid horse-liver, or at Vence, where I hear the children are in such a state of starvation that they will "eat anything you throw at them". A disgusting business

Please ask Susan (Palmer) how Augustus John is getting on. Also give my love to Harold (Acton). He will be missing China sadly. No. If I go to England, I don't want a flat in London, having had my dose of London ages ago, but a cottage or something not too far away. And if you could come there too, we could have a servant between us, which, I am told, is not allowed for one person. If they renew my passport on the 12th of this month, I am good for another month here. IF . . .

Wartime and After

Lisbon, 29 Oct, 1941

. . . I am safe here till 12 Nov. On that day, and on all following twelfths of the month, I must have my passport renewed by the police, who, I am told, may refuse to renew it from one month to the next . . .

If the police renew my passport, and if Neil Hogg does not get recalled, I shan't move from here. The idea of England makes me rather creepy, as I haven't been there for 25 years. As to black-outs, to Hell with them. I don't care whether it's light or dark, but am much more worried about the whisky and brandy problem. I suppose a cottage in the country would be the only thing for me, and a little more tolerable if you could drop in frequently. But without food. I can see to that. So cheer up!

Lisbon, 10 Dec, 1941

. . . I hope to send you a little book I have printed here called "An Almanac". It consists of extracts out of such of my priceless works as I could find here, and I have had it done only because I did not know how else to acknowledge my debt to my host, with whom and—needless to add—on whom I have been living for more than half a year. A poor performance, but I could think of nothing better. Drop me a line if it ever reaches you.

And reach me it did—that charming "Almanac"—in its neat little white jacket, its fair features all carefully thought-out by you with your usual good taste—number 16 of that first edition of 25 copies only.

It looked as if you might soon follow, for there were rumours . . . and next came a laconic postcard: within a few days you would be in England!

I thought how much you would appreciate London—the ice and snow now thick over the ruins of the Big Blitz. A stiff winter was in process, a grimmer one than any in London annals, with its complex of war, black-out, rationing and distant guns of a night. In all, a strange atmosphere—especially to someone arriving here after quarter of a century, such as yourself!

It was to Faith Mackenzie you went immediately on arrival, to

Letter to Norman

her flat in Hampstead, that 12th of January 1942, and when you took me to see her a few days later she struck me as one of the most beautiful and gracious women I had ever met in my life. By now you were staying with me, in the perfunctory but warm comfort of that flat in Cliffords Inn.

How well you looked on arrival—strong, rosy, well-fed, ready to cope with everything! A lifetime had passed since we had last been together, a whole existence of terrible and tragic events, and yet, although transplanted both, we were together just as before.

Practical and on the spot, you were telling me immediately:

“Now, my dear, the very first thing I have to do is to find a place where I can live, and then some work that will bring in enough money to keep me alive.”

Some work? To me it seemed that you might do rather well by consenting to write a few articles! Hardly anyone had stayed in France so long as you had after the war began; there should be a good deal to say concerning the six months after the collapse, even on the score of the Un-Occupied zone? And then, Lisbon. And lastly, England—after all these years.

This may have been all the more in my mind because I wanted so very much to hear *in detail* everything that had happened to you, and, indeed, in France at the time of the *débâcle*. Had people talked much of betrayal, political and military? Of collusion with the Nazis—did you find many of them Fascists? Well, possibly I might also do a sort of interview for a literary review?

However, remembering the readjustment that must be going on, I forbore, asking no questions of any kind. After three or four days I realised it was now or never, for soon you would be elsewhere, caught up by various friends, and there would hardly be time again. How to get your impressions of France—and of London?

It seemed to me that all my questions might go better on paper—they would take far less time to read than to be uttered and listened to, and the paper could be thrown into the waste-paper-basket (“Preposterous!”), whereas you could not do just

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that to me. The questions welled up. I knew you would hate such interviewing, but something might come out of it . . . I have found this paper again. What a list! Yet remember the times we had all been through, and that the keying-up of war is a real thing to many. At least, that particular feeling lasts for a while; I had been only four months in England and the edge on much was still new and sharp.

This is what I dashed off to you:

"You have not been in England for 25 years! There must be great changes. What strikes you most? In what has England progressed—and regressed? Do you like the modern buildings? What do you think of the young intelligentsia? Have you any admiration for some of the present new writers and poets? Do you think the standard of education of the people has risen?

"You were in France when the Germans arrived. What impression did you form of the reaction to this in the South? Do you think they have faith in the ultimate triumph of England and America and Russia, and in their own powers of liberation? How soon did the food situation become acute?

"And Lisbon—you were there for many months. Did you find the Portuguese in general—or which classes in particular—as friendly to the British as tradition states them to be? Do you think it is a hotbed of international political intrigue, with a great many Nazi agents? And on which side do you think is public opinion mostly? Were there signs that the Portuguese feared to be dragged into the war by order of Hitler; could and would they attempt to resist such a thing? And what of Spain in the same context?

"What are your plans? Will you, perhaps, write a new book? One on what you saw in France would be a great addition to contemporary history.

"What do you think the future holds for us this year? Could the war end in some sort of compromise with Germany? That is, if it is impossible for Germany to be beaten out and out. And the Soviet Union—have you faith in the Russian military might? Do

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you hope that Russia will play a large part in the drawing-up of the Peace Terms?

“What do you think of Great Britain’s policy in India? Right, wrong? What ought to be done there now?”

To have pelted you with all this! A quorum of reporters could hardly have done better, but they would never have cornered you—“*not on your life!*” Maybe just such stuff was one of the deterrents to your going to the United States of America, where your arrival would have been big news indeed. I thought you wouldn’t mind picking your way through it all; there might be something in this general spate—which I left for you one day on the table. Might we not go through it, in businesslike manner, while I dashed down such things as you would express yourself about? They seemed to me the kind of questions that might come up at dinner between yourself and any of those well-informed Foreign Office friends . . .

You were out when I came back but you had left a written answer, enlivened on the back in large blue pencil with words of the times:

“BLACK-OUT WINDOW!”

Darling Nancy,

You ask me more than twenty questions and I believe I can answer three or four, and none of them adequately.

What strikes me most in England is that you cannot get a copy of The Times nowadays. Also that the inhabitants of London are more solemn and preoccupied than they used to be.

Who isn’t?

I know nothing about the modern buildings. At first sight they don’t strike me as ugly, and I hope they are more comfortable than the old ones. They couldn’t be less.

As to the young writers and poets—I have not yet read a single one of them. I don’t even know their names, having been cut off from English books and papers for so long.

In South France I paid no attention to the reaction of the natives in regard to the German occupation. Politics bore me. The food-

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crisis was much nearer my heart. When it became acute, I cleared out.

I noticed no Nazi agents in Lisbon, though there may have been thousands of them. The few Germans I met were refugees. And the few Portuguese avoided politics like the plague. And the few newspapers were censored, and therefore no guide to the country's political feelings.

I have no plans, except to try and live in peace henceforward—which will be difficult, if this sort of infernal catechising is going to continue. United States and Germany and Russia and India and all the rest of them: let other people do the thinking and cackling and writing! It seems to amuse them, and does me no harm.

All very unsatisfactory, eh?

Yours ever,

Norman

None of this told about France—or about yourself, why you had left Vence and Antibes. What a strange way of taking it all! How could anyone who had been through the collapse of France not have a good deal to say?

Well—you conceded—the food situation, it had become appalling, oh yes! For instance, coffee:

“One could hardly find any at all, and what one did was muck, ersatz. It got so bad in the end that I used to pay a little boy to pick the few real coffee beans out of all the rest. And *that* was enough for only *one* good cup at a time!”

An unforeseeable piece of good-luck had helped you to Lisbon—a complete stranger, an American film-man. He had looked after you as you travelled, alone and feeling extremely ill, along the coast into Spain and Portugal, train-journeys of several days. And then, Lisbon—it was at first very lonely. But presently Neil Hogg of the British Embassy had insisted on your having a room where he lived. Admirable host! You had been with him for months and months and felt you could never repay his kindness and generosity. And later Pino had arrived, and was there yet. Lisbon—what an atmosphere! *Too much* food, And *too much* drink. And too much drinking, all the time. And then that infernal International Police all foreigners had to go to every month

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for permission to stay on just another four weeks! The uncertainty of everything . . . Living on a basis of permanent perplexity. The impossibility of getting any of one's money . . . What *should* you do, where try to go? "The United States?"—said I.

"Not on your life—although my passage was taken and paid for."

One good thing came out of Lisbon, that collating of thoughts and epigrams from your various books, ascribing one to every day of the year, at random—for such is *An Almanac*. A nicely-worded dedication too: "To Neil Hogg—Small Return for Great Kindness". It is a darling little volume, and each time I take my copy from the shelf, as just now, I cannot forbear the pleasure of opening it as you made it—at random—and wondering if the day's tenet will apply! What says this chance-given January 9?

"Abuse, hearty abuse, is a tonic to all save men of indifferent health."

That can certainly stand as an illustration of the astringent side of you. *Ben trovato*, that!

We had one or two cosy evenings in Cliffords Inn, with a small pittance of whisky and ale wheedled out of good old Peele's, that so-often fog-enshrouded pub on the corner. Now we listed all of your books, by name and in correct sequence. And which was your own favourite? *Alone* you had no hesitation in replying. And yes, now you told me a few of your thoughts:

"Nancy!"—you began suddenly with that sharp attack that always made one jump—"Have you noticed the great increase there is in the industrial eye?"

"What on earth . . ."

"The industrial eye . . . It's quite different to the agricultural eye, which is broader, accustomed to look at bigger spaces than those the industrial eye has to fix. The factory-worker or the machine-operator has to focus on something relatively small. I have noticed a *great* increase in the industrial eye, with its lesser field of vision. Quite different to the eye of people accustomed to working the land. And another thing, there seem

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to be far less of those idle women infesting Oxford Street, flattening their noses against the shop windows."

"They're all, or most of them, at the lathes and in the factories now, Norman. And that's what's going to happen to me, probably, when my age-group is registered next year, unless I can find some proper kind of job. I am tired of looking for one!"

"Now tell me the real reason why you came back from Chile, or Mexico, or Trinidad or Cuba or wherever you were, gadding about all the time like a neurotic dragon-fly. Why did you want to come to England just now?"

"I've told you already, Norman dearest, that this is 'my' war too—in so far as it is (if only partly) against Fascism. That word seems out of favour here! Despite the great bombings, people do not seem to me to be very much aroused. But then, neither of us was here while they were taking place. Well, one is impressed by the fortitude of the English . . . It took me about a year to get here from all those places in the New World, and I was determined to get here. I could not have stayed there in the state of mind I was in after the collapse of France. Besides, if I can be of use . . ."

"That's very patriotic of you, my dear."

"I am all for patriotism as I see it! To me it means fighting the common enemy in any way, in any country. I would like, preferably, to work in connection with France, within the scope of things here; and I have a very real admiration for England in its dire ordeal. Does that sound too literary to you? Well, while battling with all those negative officials and money-difficulties in the Americas, I did hope I might find some useful and interesting war work when I got here. Nothing so far! M.O.I., B.B.C., newspapers, translating . . ."

There were sirens far away—thin scarves of sound waving about over some eastern stretch of Thames maybe, and they made us think that "useful work" could have been found, surely, for anybody in such a grand-scale war as this.

Ah that Preface of yours in *Alone*! You too had been through all this ridiculous search for a war-job in 1915 or 1916—you,

Letter to Norman

the writer, editor, linguist, scientist. World War I seemed already over-staffed in England as far as *you* were concerned.

"Well, Norman . . . have you any ideas or feelings about the probable duration of this war?"

There was a pause:

"My dear, I have no hope for humanity, none whatever. There will always be people to make wars. The last one was going to be *the last one*, ha! Civilisation—pah! If it goes on like this, the use of many things will be forgotten, as happened in Italy after 1918. In some of those mountain villages, meat and milk simply disappeared. They had become so scarce, and so expensive, that they were practically forgotten as articles of food. As for books and writing—from what I can see of the publishing trade now, and what it is going to be later . . . for, make no mistake, things are going to get worse and worse, and none of us knows how long all this may go on . . . books and writing may also disappear. And then people will take to making a few scratches on rocks. And then that too will stop!"

You shook your head:

"Laugh if you like, but it's no joke as far as *I* can see."

Had you come across any new book that pleased you, I wondered, in recent months?

"I have read none as yet—with the exception of some remarkably good stories by H. E. Bates."

And what *was* happening—you asked, unaware as yet of paper-control and how many other regulations—that *The Times* should be so unprocurable? Sunday was all right, for there was always the *News of the World*—an old favourite of yours, with all those juicy crimes and murders . . .

The long snow and frost of all January and February transformed the world as seen from those high windows in Cliffords Inn, investing the towers and crenelations of the Law Courts with a strange nobility. We were, I remember, very comfortable in that little flat, and of course *that* is where *you* should have lived

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the whole time that had to be spent in London until the end of the war. No case of "wise after the event", this, but of "up went the rent" . . . What did we do the five or six days you stayed with me here? No cossetting, indeed, was needed and you were up and out early, making some kind of contact again with England; we would meet at Peele's for a snack-lunch, or in some other place in Fleet Street.

Well, what about London and its changes? You had not much to say; besides you had put a note or two for me on that paper! As for the black-out . . .

Quite enough to evoke a quiet "Blimey" from anyone—as it did from you—the first two or three times. And it was also difficult to keep one's feet in proper control that particular week, as we discovered, linked to each other by arms of prudence as well as of affection, creeping in the dark over ice-covered snow, getting lost among the fantastic outlines of Carey Street and Fetter Lane and strange empty corners that had come into being through the Big Blitz. Where were we going between those un-Londonlike snowdrifts that night in the awesome solitude? To Otto and Louise Theis in Old Square. For on meeting you with me ("Theis, Theis?", you said, "the name of a river in Austria") they were anxious to see you again. Once there, a deliciously warm evening developed, with Otto—erudite man of good counsel—and Louise, her imagination a-shimmer like a jay's wing, her tomahawk swiftness! Peaceful indeed was this unpredictable little oasis where all else was excluded, the precious-saved brandy brought in on its tray, the hot, spicy sandwiches that seemed to come from another world . . .

I urged you to stay with me as long as you liked, but the fever was on—that maddening search for "a place of one's own", for rooms, "for any kind of room" as it became later. It led you first to an unprepossessing hotel in Mayfair. The only good memory I have of that place which seemed to me such a harsh background for your return to England, is the occasion on which Dylan Thomas, standing one evening on its doorstep, was determined to go further, further—whatever obstacle lay in the way.

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He *must* meet you, he expounded to me again and again: "I *will* meet Norman Douglas, I will, I will! I must meet him—*now!*" An obstacle, however, there was: the heavy plate-glass doors were shut and locked at the preposterous hour of 9 p.m. We had left a fine cocktail party at John Lehmann's, prolonging it with some excellent confabulations at "The King's Arms" in Shepherd Market, and we had been talking of you. Now, as we passed your hotel, the urge came gloriously over Dylan. He was armed with a very stout stick and proposed to use it on the ungracious doors. (What can have been the matter with the academic idea of ringing the bell?) The stick waved frighteningly: "I *will* meet him, I will, I will!" Little as I knew Dylan, how much I admired his spirit. Finally he appeared to pay heed to my admonitions that you were always out at this hour. You would have liked him very much, I think, but not in a shower of broken glass and the accompanying hotel-comments. (This too, as long ago when you and Tzara met in Bologna, conjured up for me another Max Beerbohm caricature: "Impetuosity of gifted young poet determined to meet long-admired Cher Maître, irrespective of all obstacles—on the spot.")

We must have seen each other three or four times a week during this period, for there was a special link between us: *The Times!* By some ingenious device (maybe even through official channels) my American friend Morris Gilbert, the journalist, made it possible for the three of us to share it and you were most punctilious about its return. Really, for someone "not interested in politics . . . !"

16 Half Moon St, London, Feb, 1942

Here you are and here's your two Times. I haven't yet seen today's. What about Charles Duff? . . . These damned typist girls are getting as rare as the Great Auk, and if they could lay the same kind of egg they might at least earn a little honest money.

We had a considerable hunt for Charles Duff, for he seemed perpetually busy, and of course Dylan Thomas is right: when one wants to see somebody badly enough it should always be *on the*

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spot! The meeting was a fine one; how else, indeed, could it have been? Years and years ago you had written in *How about Europe?* of his *Handbook on Hanging*: "Had I the power, I would see that a copy was deposited on every breakfast-table in London". As for typist-trouble, it continued a long while. This was while the first pages of *Late Harvest* were being gathered, and gladly would I have done any amount more than you requested when I went to copy something for you. Very nice rooms you had found in Half Moon Street by now. Yet why, oh *why*, would these people never learn to close windows—icy blasts of March and all—doesn't one get enough fresh air in the street?—you appropriately stormed. "I don't know how long I shall be able to stay here, my dear . . ." Already that dreadful refrain could be heard: "Others are coming to these rooms . . . Booked a long time ahead . . ."

16 Half Moon Street.

Thanks so much for the really valuable two hints. The publisher wants more about the imaginary characters, and I shall have to write another two pages or so. Now, is it possible for you to type them? Don't hesitate to say if you can't. I'll find somebody else. Above all, don't curse me too much.

"Starved, poisoned and robbed!"

Nothing better could have been found for the citizen's daily motto. The words burst from you pretty frequently as you deliberated where we should meet for the traditional Shepherds Pie or the so-called sausages of war-time pub-lunches, preluded by that extraordinary soup that was like a decoction of synthetic reindeer-antlers . . . In Soho things were a little better—*canelones* at the "Barcelona" for instance, and we went there fairly often.

Where did we eat on the whole? Almost anywhere . . . at Verreys, at Shelleys . . . in the Shepherd Market "Ye Grapes" was our frequent "local", and "The Ladder Club" a haven to you of an afternoon. I think of us most throughout the war years at "The King's Arms" in Shepherd Market. It was

Letter to Norman

beautifully warm in that room upstairs, where the exhausted waitress could sometimes be got round—though not always:

“Be sure not to be late. Otherwise everything will be gone.
12.20 sharp.”

We would duly meet, generally just you and I.

“Now Nancy, what are you going to have?”

“Anything, Norman dear, anything there is.”

“Yes, but that won’t do. Make up your mind. Where’s that waitress?”

“Shepherds Pie or Fish Pie. All right, Fish Pie.”

The waitress would then come to say “It’s off”.

“Now”—you would peer at me sternly—“whatever you are going to have, *I* am going to have something else. Because they give you a much better helping if you take different things. So make up your mind!”

I could never work out this technique; it confused me and my reiterated “I’ll have whatever you don’t want” used to irritate you very much. Many a lunch began in ruffled manner for this reason; what soothed was Reid’s Stout! Afterwards we would go to my room in Half Moon Street (although that was later, when you were living in Kensington), to make proper coffee, sitting over the electric heater and talking about . . . dear me! . . . about the washing! Oh that washing and mending! What peculiar problems came up in those days. But the coffee, your way of making it, should be recorded. It used to go like this:

“Now before you start sewing on that button (it’s very kind of you to take all this trouble), how about some more coffee? Have you got any chocolate? Good. Put one large spoonful of it, grated or melted, into two parts coffee and you’ll see how delicious it is. It takes the harshness off the coffee (when it’s the African kind), without altering the taste.” The result was indeed admirable. And so was your way of making mustard! You mix the mustard-flour with vinegar instead of with water, and that keeps it moist, one might say “alive”.

The Café Royal—I mean its (now alas defunct) Brasserie, still managed a façade of ample fare, and to it we went a good deal.



1943

Looking for Spring in Epping
Forest, March 1943

Wartime and After

Here it was "robbed" rather than "poisoned and starved", for the prices controlled at 5/- a meal were made up for by the cost of the drinks. It may have been here, still rather soon after your arrival, that we had eaten before that curious little walk, mid-afternoon, with the glow of lunch still potent. A fine winter sky and icy cold. Memories, memories . . .

"Now come with me this way out of Regent Street. I used to go along here a good deal at one time when . . ." The rest of the phrase I never knew, for suddenly we were walking right *through* a house from one street into another. You turned smartly into a narrow opening, quite unsuspected and without a door, leading the way along an empty sort of dream-passage, right out of Cork Street into Bond Street. What was this? Aspreys and Finnigans in view on emerging. And no explanation. (I don't believe that spot really exists for anyone else—although I hope I am being clear about it?)

A Yugo-Slav once said to me:

"No one yet, as far as I know, has written the great poem that should be made in praise of drink during war—how it has helped actions to be accomplished that would seem unbelievable." A volunteer in Spain, he was referring to active fighting. But what about the civilian side of drink too? Now in London, the energy-provoking, euphoric, and also "Dutch-courage" aspect of it kept one going. A valuable pleasure was that session, long or short, when two or three of us would be with you of an evening in the warm saloon of some nice pub where one could sit. My 46th birthday was spent this way, at "Maudie's" in Brook Street, with you and Morris Gilbert. Euphoric—the very word. That gentle glow of good whisky and good conversation, that relief from day-long thoughts about war, that normal, hopeful feeling again! If one could only bottle *that* . . .

Does there seem to be too much of this in what I am writing? I mean, will it give a wrong impression that . . .

"Too much of *what*?" I seem to hear you say.

"Of drink, Norman. Too much about drink for good measure?"

Letter to Norman

"Too much? *I* never had too much! Just try! It couldn't be done. You couldn't get enough. Do you know what Swalla-wahoopla (that's not his real name, of course) says? He says it costs him One Pound, three shillings and sixpence—he's worked it out—before he can feel any effects *at all*, and a good deal more before he can feel the right kind of effect. That's what drinking in pubs costs *him*. And even *he* can't do that every day. He's perfectly miserable about it, perfectly miserable."

The day after that evening at "Maudie's" was March 11, and I see that I did a little typing for you. Although I put "copy" on the carbon you told me to be sure to keep, I really might have put to whom the original was addressed. Did you perhaps not tell me, or have I forgotten? It is a case of Aldington again, at that moment in the United States—whence he was to return, to France, a year and a half after the war was over—with some lofty and spiteful remarks about "the uselessness, and worse, of the French Maquis". I think this letter of yours must have been sent to the American magazine which published something, or an extract of something, that he wrote about you:

London, March 11, 1942

A dear friend has sent me a copy of Richard Aldington's Life for Life's Sake, wherein, among many kind remarks about myself, I find—all in a single passage—pp. 375–376—some statements which call for correction, if I am not to remain misrepresented in the eyes of others, both here and in America, who know me less well. I must apologise for warming up this old broth.

Let me begin by assuring Aldington that D. H. Lawrence's playful caricature of myself in Aaron's Rod was not the reason why I subsequently took up arms against him in a certain pamphlet. The reason was that Lawrence, in his introduction to the Memoirs of a Private in the Foreign Legion, had maliciously distorted the character of Maurice Magnus, the author of that book, a dead man, and a friend of mine. The pamphlet was written to defend his memory, and for no other reason. Aaron's Rod had become ancient history by this time; besides, I am far too tough to care tuppence what Lawrence or anybody

Wartime and After

else likes to say about me, in print or otherwise. If I took notice of such low-class familiarities I should have more cause to be annoyed with Aldington himself who, in a recent novel, pictures me and another person, a particular friend of his own, as engaged (under the thinnest of disguises) in so disgusting a transaction that this old and intimate friend, more sensitive than myself, promptly broke off relations with him and never resumed them. No! By all means let these literary gentlemen have their little joke at our expense and the money it procures for them. As Sheridan once observed, no man was ever written down except by himself.

Speaking of money, and of Aldington's further suggestion that I refused to lend it to Magnus in his distress, I was careful to point out in my pamphlet that I knew nothing of "this particular embarrassment" which was to cost him his life and which the despatch of money might have removed. Often low-spirited and hard up and full of bitter complaints, like many of his sanguinary temperament, Maurice invariably contrived by hard work to straighten his affairs out again and give his friends a good time. He had done this all his life, and would have done so once more but for the embarrassment—that bolt from the blue which led to his suicide within three minutes. "If only"—so I wrote—"he had told me the complete truth! But he was always shy about disclosing his troubles to me, etc."

Here is furthermore a queer story to the effect that I was given £100 for writing my pamphlet by some lady who bore Lawrence a grudge. There is not a grain of truth in this; I wish there were! I never received a penny from anyone, though I would give a good deal more than a penny to learn the origin of this legend. It was not a lady, but I myself, who bore a grudge against Lawrence for his ignoble travesty of Maurice Magnus: hence my "Plea for Better Manners". There may well have been ladies in the same case, indeed there must have been, since they published their own comments on his cat-like nature; but I am sorry to repeat that I never had the pleasure of receiving £100 from any of them.

Finally, as to my "abusing Lawrence for not being a gentleman"—surely that would have been superfluous? If any man ever wrote himself down, it was Lawrence in his introduction to *Magnus' Memoirs*.

Letter to Norman

Three of us were often together these times, Morris Gilbert, you and myself, and all of those purlieus of Curzon Street are filled for me to this day with nostalgic memories. "How can Norman always appear to be in such a good humour?" Morris frequently wondered. Heavy office-work with top-ranking officials was his lot; the only times I saw him relax seemed to be when reading Shakespeare aloud and with you at dinner! After the first few meetings which caused him to think of you in perfect balance between a great sage and a great humourist—and quite unpredictable—his word for you was "fabulous". And an even finer *psychologist* than he had thought, after you had looked over a sour official and, yes!—pronounced him to be "Quite impenitent" at the particular vice he had in mind, which would account for his meanness. This acted almost like a pick-me-up to Morris, whose definition of office-weariness pleased us both: "At the end of the day one is so exhausted that, instead of going through masses of papers on one's desk, all one *is* doing is to shift them from one side to the other".

"I do nothing all day long!" you often complained to me. Yet progress with *Late Harvest* was being made and much work it must have been to put together; it turned into something different, indeed, from what you told me that day:

"This is going to be a selection from works of mine—merely *extracts* out of my books. And, no! I shall not bother to say where they are taken from! Let others find out, if they must. Let them! Let them!"

An emphatic nod suggested some kind of trouble—although at least one rare-as-an-auk's-egg typist had been found by now. And there was also that sympathetic "Iñez" who worked with you, and with whom, now and again, you got involved in certain slightly political discussions!

And you had begun to give lessons:

"My dear, it's no joke living in London. It's damned expensive. I've *got* to find something which will bring me a little money. Now try and procure me some pupils I can give lessons to! English, French, German, Italian—I don't care, or the whole lot.

Wartime and After

Your cousin Victor says he has got me one. I could manage *three* a day."

Pretty soon a very agreeable Frenchman appeared with you and we had a drink together in one of our "locals". You certainly looked pleased with each other. Lagrave had been an Abbé, had fought in France and then escaped to England to continue the battle from here—one of the most intelligent and honest men I think I have ever met. But . . . no English. His delight at such a teacher and your appreciation of such a pupil were evident. And what had this morning's lesson been? Why, partly, the reading of *Alice in Wonderland*! What could be better? It holds one's attention while imparting the language! Lagrave had soon made a striding progress with you along the difficult English road. Not many teachers, I think, would start off grown-ups on this abiding classic of ours!

"Grown-Ups"—That word recalls a pretty quip of yours by that same pub which had such a blank look on it of a morning. Whether this was due to its own intransigent nature or to the American soldiery billeted near-by who drank it dry every night, we never knew, and it was no favourite of ours. Thinking about lunch, we stood outside, you, Morris and I. A great caterwauling had been going on across the street and it seemed to issue from that sort of Temple in front of us. What on earth . . . And then, the sound having ceased, the makers of it began to come out in twos and threes, all dim, elderly people—and not Sunday either. So that was the cause! You looked at them and shook your head, murmuring gently "And grown-ups too . . ."

My memories of these times are in a sort of ice-casket, for enfolding everything was the interminable cold. It reached its peak the day we went to Oxford, where you were going to visit old friends: Professor Dawkins, and Dr Oscar Levy who was then at Dr Stella Churchill's. And Basil Leng too—who, according to you, was "getting more and more astringent every day". How I blessed him for his kindly efficiency in finding me a room for the night in all the congestion of Oxford.

Our train took at least three hours and was unheated. Muffled

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in our overcoats we sat in complete silence the whole way. Poor England! After the horror of the massive bombings and the miracle of the retreat from Dunkirk it lay now in the grip of a situation that was evidently going to last a very long time. I had no doubts as to the ultimate victory. Solid is England, solid and steadfast—and dogged. A very great quality indeed, and how much I admired it. As for Oxford, it seemed almost grimmer than London, but its inner life was going on, and we were soon in the pleasant warmth of Professor Dawkins's rooms, where, talking in a most courteous manner, he warmed us with that dependable stand-by, some very strong tea. Who knows how many years it was since you had last met this admirable critic and analyst of your writings . . . Later we were with Dr Stella Churchill with whom I felt anything could be discussed, not only because she is a psychiatrist but on account of her sense of humour. Was this the first time I met Dr Levy? No, of course not. That had been with you somewhere in France when you told me:

“Ha! Dr Levy—he cleared out of Germany, just cleared out! He *says* he saw it all coming. He got away before Hitler could stop him. And with all of his work too. He just hopped it, my dear, and settled in Monte Carlo where he has been publishing a very good review indeed called *Psyche*.”

Taking note now of Dr Levy's noble head—evocative of a piece of sculpture—his calm expression, the beautiful rhythm of his manner, the sort of “patina”—in fact—about him, the words *die reine Wahrheit* came into my mind. And some very bitter thoughts about Hitler and the rest of that gang of criminals, and how Germany, once full of fine characters was now, alas . . .

Leaving you all on this unspoken thought I was soon again thinking of Germany and of British “doggedness”. What—with this icy cold, the landlady dare tell me I must not have that microscopic electric heater on all night, although at least doubly paid for in advance, as “it might spoil the furniture”? We stormed at each other, but she won. Invading Nazis would have had to slay this particular domestic bulwark of England. When doggedness becomes stubbornness such as this, no other means can succeed.

Wartime and After

Soon after I did find some work, in one of the Free French organisations in London. Who would have thought that a six-hour shift could be so exhausting? Practised office-worker as he was, my nerve-racked temper caused Morris to exclaim "Have they never heard of *permutations and combinations*?" The rota seemed unmanageable here, the allotting of hours so unhappily made, that every one felt—and was—overworked. And then there were those six nights on end, too. We did not meet so very often now!

"Preposterous!" you hurled at me once. "What on earth do you do it for? You'd much better give it up!"

"Will that find me more congenial work in some other French department, or at the M.O.I or B.B.C?"

"But I thought you were doing a book at present?"

"I *am* doing a book—or rather, finishing that long pamphlet with George Padmore on colonial matters that I was at when this began. I can't just give that up, can I?"

You were the only person I saw all these times who soothed my exhausted nerves and took my mind off the horrible subjects we had to grapple with.

"And what on earth are they?", you asked.

It all came in through ear-phones—enemy-stuff from Paris, Berlin, Vichy, etc.—a good deal of it Jew-baiting. I was known as *Correctrice-Assimilée-à-Expéditeur*—(a "Radio monitor", in language simpler than this delectable French appellation). My work was to correct all the script in French as transferred to paper by typists listening (in great weariness) to what came into their ear-phones. Pages and pages per day were processed thus with an accompaniment of aerial screechings on top of Vichy blasts. Twenty years of life in France all over the country and with all kinds of people had never presented me *once* with such types as those who ran this office, although my fellow-workers were all right. The typists, in fact, were often great fun, for they would have a good go (in their bewilderment) at enriching the *mêlée* with whimsies of their own—all phonetic errors, or nearly.

You too thought that a *centre de documentation* was delightful and

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were as mystified as myself as to what could be meant by *maintenir les yeux en amont*, whereas *un fait d'hiver parmi beaucoup d'eaux*—a wintry fact among many waters—seemed to us both pure poetry.

Well, what did you think? Forty people in all were employed in recording and transcribing enemy news and ballyhoo (much of it monitored by the B.B.C. in any case and thus available) and in producing exactly fifty-five copies of a daily, twenty-page, stencilled bulletin which went to heads of Governments in exile and other important personages, whom we all felt could not have time or desire to read it.

There was much else to tell you in detail about the "political" atmosphere in this place as we occasionally dined together before my night-shift, where I learned so much about fatigue . . . those endless hours when ears and eyes give out, the spine turns to rubber, and nerves alternate between strung catgut and damp, flapping sails: dehumanisation by exhaustion.

None of it brought a smile to your lips; I had been telling you about it in the hopes of a good tirade. You listened in complete silence, saying quietly at the end:

"And all of it perfectly useless!"

"How do I know for certain it *is* all perfectly useless? I feel some compunction. We "girls" there all do! And I have got to have regular war work. The atmosphere of everything here . . ."

"Perfectly useless. You'd much better give it up."

"What will I find to do instead?"

Square pegs in round holes appeared to be the answer.

Meanwhile you were getting on finely with Lagrave's English and also giving Italian lessons to someone else. And you had made a dash to Tilquhillie Castle, the old family seat near Banchory; the great gaunt, impressive sort of "Keep" it is may be seen on the card you sent me. But even in Banchory, all that distance away in Scotland, there were crowds, no rooms, difficulty with food and drink—and so, back quickly to London.

Wartime and After

After three months and more with the Free French, five other fellow-workers and I resigned the same week for reasons of health, but as I left the establishment the charming Monsieur F—, who had come sometimes to consult a file in our building, asked me if I would care to become his secretary. He assured me it would be “quite different to all this”.

So I was soon again at work. And this time, when you enquired about my new role, I thought I should call myself “a filing clerk”, bound to the ordinary eight-hour day, reading all the English papers, marking everything that seemed of interest to France, and then filing documents for the rest of the time. It was not exactly “creative”, although my Monsieur F— enchanted me by his rather mysterious detachedness. Weeks and months passed thus—the landings in North Africa, the stupendous battle of Stalingrad; the turn of the tide at last, as was manifest to all. Yet it was a long, black winter. And if I had kept even the briefest diary it would have said things of us like this:

“Norman came to fetch me for dinner. Difficult and unnecessary to go far in the black-out. A certain gloom at the start. More lively later, but thrown out of everywhere by closing-hours. Norman certainly at work on that volume of extracts from most of his books—on the score of which, when lightly questioned, he will say nothing. Last night he told me as we clung tightly to each other in the pitch dark, walking between our respective rooms in Queen and Half Moon Street: “89 steps, my dear, between your place and mine. I count them every time we leave each other like this”.

How I wished we could ever have managed to live under the same roof! But not once did there seem to be rooms available at the right moment. Back from my office in a not unpleasant trance of fatigue, I would eat my spam and boiled potatoes cooked on that dear little old gas-ring, drinking coffee, sitting on the floor by the gas-fire—sometimes “dreaming”, now and then writing a poem. You would be well away long before then from our Shepherd Market haunts, dining with John Davenport or Desmond Ryan in Chelsea and Kensington, or with Viva and

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Willie King in that decorous house of theirs so full of good cheer, or with your publisher Roger Senhouse, or my cousin Victor Cunard, or how many of your other friends. We were pretty often together, too, of an evening—such as on that occasion with Neil Hogg and Professor Walter Starkie in the Carlton Grill, when you and the Professor looked as if to carry on with your jokes (classical subjects, mainly) and your ripostes long after any closing-time, war or no.

All those winter months merge for me, when not in my room or in the office, into one or two small, composite vignettes—a sort of conglomerate of the strange uniforms and foreign faces of Britain's loyal subjects from various parts of the world standing about in Pubs; or in cartoons of even "straighter" British, when, on my way home of an evening, I would come across the chap-in-the-cap and the man-in-the-mac, dallying sadly over their strength-depleted beer, mumbling away to each other: "things may be even worse when it's all over", and "at least we're not occupied here as they are in France".

In France—and in Italy too . . .

"I'm not worried about what's happening to my people in Antibes", you said to me time and again; "but what about Emilio in Florence? Not a word, of course. He *may* be having a bad time, as the servant—that's what they'll say—of an Englishman. I left the care of *everything* there to Emilio and to his wife."

At length the winter seemed to be edging towards spring. Should we go and look for it, I asked you one day, now no longer an office worker but doing a few articles for the M.O.I. and the proofs of *The White Man's Duty*.

"Go and look for what?"

"For spring, Norman! Why not at Epping? That forest, you know . . ."

I took a number of snapshots of our "Looking for Spring day". We went in hopeful mood on top of a bus, for neither of us, I think, had been out of London for months and the thought of

Wartime and After

even a *soupeçon* of some pale green buds was enticing. Alas! Like so much else, it was "not yet"—hardly more than a grey interlude between one darkness and the next, a mean, miserly day. And yet, London-wise, it was panoramic and distinctly evocative somewhere near the River Lea. Yes! Your *London Street Games* had sometimes been more or less around here. And you told me about Eric and what a good chap he became after you had taken him from the grim environment, the bad rut he was getting into. Well, everyone had been delighted: Eric, his parents and yourself! All of this district made you somewhat nostalgic. These confounded memories—and where the devil *was* Epping Forest?

So imperceptible when we got off that one wondered if it were visible only in summer. After a terrible pub-lunch we wandered on, looking for spring now in good earnest. Not a bud, not a sprig! Merely a few moments in the icy wind, with a pale shaft of sunlight that made the snapshots just possible, and then back to London—by now "in the gloaming", "returned empty" . . .

"If I ask you again, Norman, how long you think the war is going on, you will say I am getting neurasthenic, but . . ."

"God alone knows—and He won't tell!"

"I must apologise for my awful gloom and dullness!"

"You can't give what you haven't got! Nobody can! We're in the grip, my dear, in the grip . . ."

How we harped on the sombre chords that day—the old times in Italy and France and Tunisia. Should we ever get back? . . . how much more was to come? . . . and so on.

"*Lack-lustre*, dearest Norman, is what George Moore would have chosen, perhaps, after considerable thought, as a fitting adjective for a day such as this!"

"I suppose we ought to be thankful that we're at least still alive"—and muttering that old, national corrective of all Italians, *Pazienza!* you enfolded yourself in a silence well in keeping with the fog and murk we found enshrouding the streets of our national colossus.

Letter to Norman

Even a small excursion out of it seemed to relieve monotony, and as for a weekend in the country——

“What about going together to look for any vestiges there may be left of the *Early Britons*?” you suggested a few weeks later.

Now how would one recognise such a thing?

Why, by the particular shape of the head, for one. They are said to exist yet—you told me—just a *few*, in the right place . . . Scientific knowledge is necessary to detect one, but you were pretty sure you would spot an Early Briton at sight. In the vicinity of where Gilbert White, the ornithologist, lived, at Selborne; that’s where they are to be found, *if* they can be found.

We went for a weekend to Alresford near Selborne in Hampshire, keeping a sharp look-out. Ah! In the second train, that little boy—well, at a pinch, the shape of his head, and the set of his eyebrows might pass. What was to happen if we did come across any, I could not quite see. Would they know themselves if they possessed such an interesting racial strain? Would there be talk about the subject, or would it be you who imparted the fact to them?

Alresford, pleasant enough this early summer morning, was an example of what war does to innkeepers: “Only for two nights, mind”, they told us sharply; “can’t give you much to eat. You’d better have dinner out, if you can find any. Lucky we’ve got rooms, even if you did book in advance”.

Adequate as it all was, these words put us in rather a bad temper, and, as you unpacked your bag you took something out and gave it a couple of hard punches:

“This is Alfred”, you remarked savagely, “I can’t sleep without Alfred.” Never a more hard, uncompromising little pillow was now revealed and flung on to the bed. I wondered I had never before heard you refer to this grim and brickish bed-fellow.

At lunch you thought we had best see about dinner immediately, otherwise—back to London, Early Britons or no! And I thought, not for the first time, how good it was that either or both of us might be in an awful temper at moments when together without this being of the slightest importance! What caused

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yours to evaporate, I cannot tell, but mine was blown away forthwith by some drolly-put observation of yours—as sharp as a whiff of ammonia.

A beautiful walk put us in high spirits. No Early Britons seemed to be about, but they were immaterial at the moment and there was always tomorrow. Obviously neither you nor I were made for the English landscape—we told each other—and you remembered having once likened it to being *in* a salad—so much green all around. And look at this, it's practically summer! Now, in the South of France or Italy . . . whereas here there was a smack in the air that could not be called otherwise than bracing. The wind sent shivers entrancing to watch through the long grass. England is beautiful too! And yet . . . However today we were without that dreadful nostalgia which often came to us when together in London. Not a *souffçon* of nostalgia! Reminisce as we did, it was certainly in no muffled minor. Where could so and so be by now? And that old sod here, and that other old sod there?

"And *both* of them the wrong kind of sods, too, ha!"

"And that is?"

"Think it out, my dear, think it out!"

Yes—and what about that woman?

"She was what's called *encore désirable* . . . I wish I had a franc for every time she told me about her husband; I should be rich now! Nothing could stop her, *nothing*. That man was never killed. He just disappeared so as to get away from her! Suffering from ingrowing virginity, that's what *she* was. No affair of mine though . . . *what next!*"

"I suppose you couldn't have advised her about a lover?"

"Catch me! She might have thought I was leading up to myself, ha! Foreigners are very funny at times! I could have told her 'There's nothing like a clean old man' . . . Do you think she would have liked that, eh?"

"You would have had to tell her 'think it out' more times than one, dearest Norman!"

After a two-hour walk in all this bracing air, should we perhaps descend on T. W. Earp who lived somewhere nearby? A certain

Letter to Norman

delicacy restrained us. It would not be fair to arrive, even all braced up as we were, without warning. A slight telephone call, maybe . . . The other deterrent was that we had no idea of his address.

Well, tomorrow, Selborne—Early Britons or no. Just a few miles away by bus. You talked enchantingly about Gilbert White and his famous tortoise—on which, unbeknown to us, Sylvia Townsend Warner was writing a book at this very moment.

It struck me as an enchanting village and, just by it is, surely, one of those ancient magical places. What else could the amazing plantation of nigh-mammoth beeches be—or, more exactly, the site that lies at the top of that painfully steep path among them? Up this you went like a bird! Faster, ever faster, it seemed to me, panting and amazed further and further behind. No talk from you today about “feeling rather squimpy this morning”; no clutching of my arm: “Hang on to me . . . this damned giddiness . . .” as had sometimes been the case in Tunisia. And what a sense of serenity there was up here; how appreciative, how sensitive to it were both of us.

As for the Early Britons . . . they had brought us here, after all, and must not be blamed for not appearing—although, you reminded me, if there *are* any about still it is only in this part of England they would be discoverable.

2 Hereford Square, London, 13 June, 1943

I haven't seen you for ages. When do we meet again? I should like to come to your place and consult—if you have it—your copy of Negro . . .

“I haven't seen you for ages”—not, indeed, since that lovely dinner full of summer *vague à l'âme* when I took you to Elliott and Phynka Seabrooke's flat in Baker Street just opposite what we immediately said should be called “Druce's Hole”. An enchanting couple, you agreed, as alert and sympathetic as could be. And what was it Elliott said that seemed so well put? Something like this: “Here we are in the middle of an unprecedented war . . . That great thing across the road, by the way, is due to

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a land-mine . . . Isn't it frightful to think of *war*? Suppose there's another after this one? Science has progressed so far, all that will be necessary is some ghastly scientist hidden away in the earth somewhere in Central Africa, for all we know, sitting in front of a button. He presses it—and blows up half the world!"

You had moved to a new address, and so had I, and now the whole of central London lay between us. It was, no doubt, that remarkable "Letter about Arusha" you were in need of seeing again; something in my Anthology, in any case, to be referred to in your book of extracts—still progressing, still kept very quiet. And at this very moment, with the war raging all along North Africa, other words of yours (though, to be sure, quite different in tone and subject, about a part of that continent) were being of the greatest interest to the British Army—no less! This interesting fact was only imparted several months later, but well do I remember the pleasure it gave you when that Colonel in the R.A.O.C. said that *Fountains in the Sand* had been "more useful to us than anything prepared by our experts during the campaign in Tunisia".

A curious place in which to hear of the capture of Mussolini was that Yorkshire bus bringing me down from near the good grassy peak of Addleborough, the extraordinary news coming from the wireless of a wayside inn as we passed. By the time I reached London again there was a note from you:

2 Hereford Square, 27 July, 1943

I have just found what I suppose is your copy of La France Libre at Ryan's house where I may have left it. Shall I bring it to you anywhere—a good excuse for a drink to the damnation of Mussolini . . ."

As for *La France Libre*, although this was quite unknown to me at that time, they were to be the publishers, eleven months later, of a book of mine as yet unplanned! To this you contributed aid, giving me two telling little satirical poems by Neil

Letter to Norman

Hogg for inclusion in that War Anthology, *Poems for France*—in connection with which it seemed to me I was writing all that autumn to every poet in England: "Have you a poem to send me connected with France since the war began?"

Autumn brought us closer to each other, for I had moved again and was now in Half Moon Street in a wonderful sort of "bed-sitter" and we resumed our pleasant rhythm of lunches in the pubs around here. One seemed to be having to think more and more about food, and of all the rarities, look what was produced by you:

2 Hereford Square, 19 Dec, 1943

Dearest, I have three fresh eggs for you. So don't forget Tuesday, Queen's, 7.30.

We were often at the Queen's Restaurant, Sloane Square, including a dinner on your birthday this year, and for me it had memories that stretched far back. A night, for one, during the "old" war, with Augustus John, Sybil Hart Davis and Alvaro Guevara, when we dined so long and well that dear Augustus was dashing off exquisite sketches of everyone at the end of it on the tablecloth. Waiters in consternation were assured that piece of napery would be paid for and cut up on the spot, and I still have the little head thus drawn of me. Out of the question, alas, to be allowed to get into such an euphoric condition during *this* war, we sighed. If restaurants knew the importance they have in the moral as well as the physical life of people . . . Well, what then? Let us not get sentimental! It's bad enough when one is in bed at night with one's thoughts, you murmured. As for people's voices—sometimes they go on and on in one's head, continuing the conversation when one wants to sleep, and can't. To Hell with people!

All of that winter I worked on my Anthology of poems for France in the bed-sitter that could be made so warm, and small wonder, for £1 5s.—I worked it out—used to go into the electric meter every week. Often you came here after lunch and we brewed some of that delicious coffee. And once there was an enforced

Wartime and After

case of "where I dines I sleeps"—the last bus gone and the last Tube, with the nocturnal wails of "Taxi, Taxi" ringing in vain through the black-out all down Piccadilly.

Often à deux that winter, Christmas night is one of the times I think of frequently yet, in certain moods. There was a little party for you at which Morris had supplied some munificent American whisky, and there you sat in my bed-sitter ensconced in all of its dilapidated late-Victorian comfort as five or six of us moved and conversed around you. Finally we were left alone. A distant Radio seemed to be drumming some complicated kind of rhythm and it merged with the languor in my mind, producing a sort of timelessness . . .

"Come and sit by me on the sofa."

We sat for hours, I know, our arms linked, talking of the things we would do, later . . . later . . . At present we were playing at being in the *Wagons Lits*—the very sofa could be said to resemble one. We were crossing France towards Italy, and as romantic about it as could be! *And why not?*

Maybe this was one of the times you told me (the same sentiment was addressed to one or two others as well, on various occasions) that, when the time came, you would like to think of yourself as "putrefying gracefully in your arms, my dear . . ."—a winning, if at first somewhat startling, remark! It makes me horribly nostalgic to think of that evening now. I cannot tell what kind of charm you had as a young man—nor yet at the age of forty. But, damn it, the charm you had then in 1943, at the age of seventy-five . . .

Crabs—

* * * * *

Whichever pub it was that still sported one or two of these monsters on its depleted snack-counter where they looked like plaster effigies, far too splendiferous to be real, we were in that place. And they caused you to say something that would hardly have occurred to anyone else:

"If you're in doubt, I should have Crab if I were you. They're bound to be pretty good at present."

Letter to Norman

"Why particularly at present?"

"Plenty of dead sailors floating about nowadays!"

Somehow I don't remember us ever having Crab? Far too expensive, no doubt.

I used to think too much fuss was made about the dreadful quality of the food, the scarcity or inexistence of many articles. What, in the fourth year of this monstrous war, what *could* be more natural? I never had any difficulty with the concept of "total war", which, obviously, includes "total starvation"—if the enemy can manage as much. British rationing seemed to me very well organised and very fair—not at all the view of many! When fibrocitis and mental, physical, psychic and intangible exhaustion became my lot, I began to think that you, fussing a good deal twice a day over your meals, were not so wrong after all—if more vocal than everyone else put together!

If ever there was a corrective to the ridiculous statement that may still sometimes be heard about "war having to come from time to time so as to kill off superfluous people", it was yourself.

Clad all that winter in never less than two of "Auntie's" hand-knitted jerseys, you complained that "shrinkitis" was going on. And with a movement like that of a clown, you suddenly pulled out your trousers at the top, exclaiming:

"How many people do you think could get in here with me?"

The space revealed was impressive, the gesture so sudden and elastic that the trousers appeared to have been made for the purpose.

"It's no joke, my dear, no joke. What about 'Peace at any price'?"

Soon now the erratic calendar of air-raids was to present us with the "Spring Blitz" and, as if in premonition, you asked me one day:

"Can you find me a small bag? For some time I've been sleeping with such things as I *do* intend to try and keep, beside me. One may have to get out at any moment . . ."

Last *lares et penates* should be to hand always. For me the first

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of that particular series of raids is bound up with re-reading *South Wind*. And for some time after it began, in all its appalling majesty of noise, your description of the rocks seen from the sea held my attention. Had our dinner at Wilton's with Neil Hogg as generous host, been a few days later we should have felt the effects of the monster that fell so close, the "Spink" bomb.

2 Hereford Square, London, 19 Feb, 1944

. . . I'm just off to the Swedish Institute to get mauled about. Lively last night, wasn't it?

A dreadful rheumatism which crippled one of your shoulders . . . As for the "liveliness"—could it be that a Blitz was going to start all over again? Something as big as before? Often you had said you had "no nerves worth speaking of", and now indeed was a time one might notice the fact: apparently impervious!

Some weeks ago I had planned to go to Dorset near where Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland had an enchanting country house. Could I not induce you to come with me? No! Yet by all means let me look for some quiet place with good food down that way, for a little later. Soon enough I found what seemed, relatively, just the spot, but alas:

2 Hereford Square, London, March 17, 1944

I had a ceiling on my head the other night (not here) and all the windows in the house were smashed. No fun. Got your long one about Weymouth by the second post. No. It does not appeal to me. So sorry you had all the trouble of describing the place. I stay here till about 21 April and shall then perhaps go for a tour of inspection in the S.W. of England, in the course of which I may see you. But I am determined to be quite comfortable for 2-3 months on end, and White Nothe don't sound like that. I want bath, breakfast in bed, etc., my reason being that I am going to do myself as well as possible, death being so near.

Oh the deplorable tone at the end of this! I was worried, too, for your safety in London, although there were two thundering air-raids exactly down here at this time. A great disappointment

Letter to Norman

that White Nothe, near Lulworth Cove on those ravishing cliffs, could not tempt you. I had seen you in imagination here, and in Dorchester and Maiden Newton, with us three loving women hanging on to your every word! Seen us walking, you and I, in and out of those stupendous Downs, a wild scene fit for Shakespearean tragedy—just vacated by an Artillery School, judging by the extraordinary amount of metal fragments left behind. One more good possibility gone wrong! And you had told me you liked Sylvia and admired her writing—though what was the meaning of that peculiar remark that issued from you with a shake of the head: “Cat-women, those two—cat-women . . .” They were delighted with it, in any case. Their great love of cats—what could be apter? But the tone, my dear, the tone of the pronouncement! Bitterly disappointed we all were that you would not come.

Others, too, were disappointed, for you might have had three *more* loving women all hanging on to all of your words. I mean those two enchanting Powys sisters, Gertrude and Philippa, and dear Alyse Gregory, Llewellyn Powys’s widow—all of whom lived near Chaldon (from which I had walked to White Nothe) in the great curve of the wintry Downs. How much your arrival had been looked forward to here, certain plans tentatively made . . . For instance, Gertrude’s bees. She kept them between two floors in the house (at least, that lot). And by an ingenious device, were one above, they could be seen ascending, all warm and comfortable, into her bedroom and could actually be gazed at—as one looks into a Sea-Box—from bed itself, encased as they were in the hollow, wooden bed-table with a pane of glass on top. Those bees! She said they would *certainly* cure your rheumatism if you would let them sting you sufficiently. *Would* you let them do this? What was I to say? I wondered myself. . . And with Alyse you would no doubt have had many a good talk about past times and their writers and writing, she having been the editress of the *Dial* during the twenties. Alas again that six loving women could not all be fussing around you, for a spell, in Dorset . . .

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The raids were continuing in London and I wondered to which particular work of yours this remark referred on the back of an envelope on March 22:

Collins have been blitzed out. That's what happens to people who send back my MSS.

The letter inside told me:

We have rather noisy nights here. I was thinking of Cornwall (which I prefer owing to its non-English flavour) but with these new regulations I can certainly not go to the seaside. Do you know of any nice inland place there?

The Ban! Such were the new regulations for all of the South Coast—lengthy and well-guarded prelude to the invasion of the Continent—that all non-regular residents were sent thirty miles inland. Why could you not have come to that charming inn I found at Montacute in Somerset? Partly, perhaps, because the de luxe, hand-setting and printing of your *Summer Islands* had begun at the Corvinus Press, and you wanted to supervise this closely—only 45 copies—such was this edition.

The summer that followed was exciting—the Invasion swept on fiercely, with Doodle-Bug-Buzz-Bombs falling “like mad” all over London and around it. Alarming and ghastly as they were, I think of some nice moments with you, with you and Augustus John together in the lordly Pub or Lounge of the Pier Hotel at Battersea Bridge, where suddenly and mercifully the drink supply had generously expanded—to steady the clients’ nerves.

“Some people swear we are in a regular track of the beastly things here—but at least one can have a proper drink, any number of drinks at present, ha!”

This “secret weapon number 1” appeared to worry you—and Augustus—less than it did many others, who could be heard saying it was “worse than the Big Blitz”. Things were moving fast on the Continent and we were in good spirits the night Morris Gilbert and his cousin Morris Bishop (an erudite Pro-

Letter to Norman

fessor of Romance Languages in an American University), and you and I sat under that long, rose-heliotrope sunset by the Thames, with crashes taking place two or three to the minute and some scholarly conversation proceeding the while between you and the Professor. And my Anthology *Poems for France* had come out exactly at the moment of the invasion; it was selling fast and you thought it a good production, considering the regulations for wartime books. Another long dinner together comes to mind—that rather dreamy occasion with Harold Acton in the very middle of the empty Ritz—of all places—safeish and silent, at least.

If Chelsea and Battersea were “in a track”, what indeed of Kensington where you lived, in the direction of which I thought I noticed all such engines as were perceptible to be making their way after speeding over Chelsea where I then had a room? One morning came the announcement from Goebbels that the whole of this district was to be obliterated that night . . . How you would have enjoyed the sight of those two very calm and gentle old ladies setting to rights that evening the contents of an elaborate dolls-house where previous commotions had upset the tiny chairs and crockery . . .

Grandly the Invasion progressed—with Italy being raced through northwards. It was now we thought of the poet John Gawsworth in the R.A.F. in the fighting there. Who knows, he might get to Florence and be able to find out something of Emilio, and of your apartment? Events were moving so fast that I feared a race had begun (in the eyes of the publisher, that is) between them and the work I was doing—the translation into English of Gabrielle Picabia’s excellent, topical book on the Occupation of France; the publisher would tell the author that the book was “out of date” . . . And now the house I was in closed down, the French who ran it leaving for France, and grieving that I could not go with them, I went to Oxford; at least I should enjoy your company some of the time there, while I hastened to finish my work.

Many a stroll we had together through the crowded streets of an evening to the depleted pubs before the usual hunt for a

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meal, many a wistful exchange of thoughts about Italy and France. Oxford! A preposterous place it had become, "with all these ridiculous people infesting the streets; where do they all come from?"—you wondered. You were with old and close friends, with Dr Levy and his daughter Maud and her husband Rosenthal, and with Stella Churchill, *all* very pleasant people indeed, but oh the restlessness of those days—Paris being headed for, Normandy over-run, wall-newspapers going up there in the villages to inform the inhabitants of the progress of military events, and Italy, Italy *might* be entirely emptied of the enemy soon now; it looked that way at the moment. But meanwhile you could not go on staying here, and one day I put you into a crowded train for Chester.

Blossom Hotel, Chester, 12 August, 1944

Let me know your movements, so that we can meet if possible. The number of my place in Florence is 14 Lungarno delle Grazie, and Orioli's cook, on the first floor, should know about my place. But even more important for me is to hear about Emilio. I enclose a letter for him tho' I don't know whether the censor will allow it. His address is on it, and I should be ever so glad if your friend John Gawswordh could at least go there and find out whether Emilio is still alive. Yes! The journey here was awful!

Same address, Aug 15, 1944

I hang on here, hoping I may soon find an asylum somewhere. Nothing up to the present! I could go to Southwell Gardens, but I should be quite alone there . . . Mrs King has just written that they had "119 bombs (official) in one night" and that never a night passes without her house shaking. I wish we could both go to Crowley's village and stay there. Could we? I might be able to help you with some work. I would write there direct, but don't know whether "Aston Clinton" would find you. Yes, I'll risk it. Have written you with this post also to 162 Walton Street, Oxford. Love to Aleister.

"Crowley's village in Bucks"! It seemed a sort of happy back-water off the rushing stream of difficulties and events and he had

Letter to Norman

betaken himself to it after being severely shaken by bombs in London. Now, on the one occasion I was there to see him, he told me he was "working against Hitler *on the astral plane*". Far away and long ago was all that hoolie-goolie period of his (although these words, I admit, made me start), and he was a most interesting person to talk to. We had got on well when I met him first in London in 1933—no ectoplasmic or occult ties between us for an instant!

It would be delightful to have spent some time with you and him, and he welcomed the idea of your arrival. I could almost visualise the general tone of the conversations you would have, if not the exact subject-matter . . . But alas, again:

Chester, Aug 21, 1944

Just got yours of the 19th. With the same post came a letter from Faith Mackenzie to say she could put me up at Wells from 5-28 Sept, but with some difficulty. That would be better, as Wells is on the way to Cornwall where I should be on the 28th. So don't let Aleister fix up anything definite. Can you tell me by what means I could get into France? I might be of use there and I should like nothing better.

Peace Close, Somerset, 28 Aug, 1944

Had one or two nice letters from Crowley who seems to be as wizardish as ever. I have just heard that the top floor of where I lived at 2 Hereford Square has been blown off. Nothing of mine there. Also that our place at 7 Southwell Gdns. has been burgled. Nothing of mine to steal!

Same address, 8 Sept.

How awful about Réanville being smashed! I fear it will be the same with my place in Florence. I too am trying to get to France. Would Saurat be of any use?

No one, I feared, could be of any aid in one's terrible desire to get to France—not even the capable and kindly Professor Denis Saurat of the Institut Français de Londres, nor any of those influential F.O. friends of yours. We were civilians, the war far

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from over. That we owned property (it turned out later) made it "even worse". Now why?

Yet, I thought vaguely, you might get to France if only you would apply to go there *on a mission*—for such was, understandably, necessary; in your case it would be to write, to describe. As for my house at Réanville, now that a little news circulated between the two countries, every brief message that came from the two French friends there, the only two, said: "Nothing, nothing is left". It looked as if months more of suspense and anxiety were to follow—despite the fact that—yes!—the publisher (curses upon him) turned down the book I had long ago finished translating, telling the author that it *was* "out of date". One evening, now back in London, came the distant sound of heavy artillery: the hammering to pieces of Boulogne. Another evening, a gigantic bang which hung in the air interminably. And what might that be? The first of the V2.s, somewhere in Chiswick.

Now, thanks to Aleister Crowley, I found myself living in Jermyn Street, in the house where the spiritualist-proprietress had actually named a room after him (for *séances*) and where, although she threatened me with her "I shall need your room soon", I managed to stay for months. In this light he was indeed my benefactor, for lodgings were impossible to find. How much we talked of him on one occasion! Did you think, for instance, that he really used those little phrases with which he *said* he began and ended *positively all* of his letters? Did he carry it as far as this:

"Messrs Buntleys Bank.

Dear Sirs,

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

Concerning the matter in hand . . ."

Ending with:

"Love is the Law; love under will.

Yours truly . . ."

A very fantastic figure, Crowley!

"*Nothing* in comparison to what he was," you assured me.

Letter to Norman

And all those scarlet and sable events, were they not connected only with people who flung themselves blindly into whatever mysteries he seemed to represent? You were inclined to agree, although even to me, what I had just said sounded a bit too easily "dismissive". Such a mixture of good and of horrible *taste* in that man . . .

"He was hot stuff, and no mistake, my dear. They can stand a good deal in Italy, but in the end he was too much for them, and he had to go!"

Meanwhile I was an office-worker again, this time as a translator of English into French (with a good deal of military Americanese thrown in), striving to comply with the request to make it all sound as much like proper French journalism as possible. The eight-hour shifts at SHAEF in Kingsway were gruelling, left one no time for anything, but kept one from miserably brooding over that problematical return to France and what would be there to face one. Typing, and broadcasting at dictation-speed, all day or all night, I now knew the hurried step of the early morning worker, the muffled, dreary return of an evening, the sameness of "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow".

And then Morris Gilbert came on leave and vividly described what he had seen in Normandy—the shambles of my Puits Carré, all due to the results of the animosity of the village mayor, for no fighting had ever occurred just around it. I see his gesture yet, holding out a battered copy of the red leather edition of *One Day*, in which you wrote a few words for him then and there while he told us: "A mattress of ravaged books, six deep, now covers the whole of the bathroom floor". He had found it emerging somewhere near the top . . .

7 Southwell Gardens, London, 13 Oct, 1944

So glad to get your two notes but very sorry there is so little chance of our meeting. I hope they don't work you to death? I should be very glad to hear what Morris has to say. Would you please thank Gaws-

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worth, when you write him, for all the trouble he is taking about Emilio. I am still without news, and can also not get through to my people at Antibes. They may have moved away from there.

And when, soon after, you did get through, that expression so typical of Southern France that the little boy would add to his mother's letters was nearer to making one weep than smile:

"*Je languis après vous*. Why don't you come back to us now that you can?"

If only . . .

The slow and steady production of *Summer Islands* was still going on and we went two or three times together to the Corvinus Press when I had a half-day off. Impeccable was the work, all hand-set by meticulous Mr Cardew, with a reproduction of a beautiful old map. I was so tied to SHAEF that I remember thinking of you as almost gallivanting about, and dearly would I have loved to see *where* you can have taken Dr Levy one day:

"He came up from Oxford, my dear, and he says it's the first time he has ever been inside a pub. Think of that! I took him to one. He was perfectly horrified at it. Said he'd never imagined anything so dreadful could exist! Full of men standing up drinking—women too . . ."

One's good or ill humour depended considerably on the news, and now and then your step could actually be described as "spry". In such a moment, perhaps, the Sitwells met you in the street when—how peculiar, the very same note after all these years!—Osbert said:

"You're a very good advertisement for the evil life!"

To which you replied:

"Yes, I know! It's uphill work now; still, I try to do my best."

7 Southwell Gdns, 20 Oct, 1944

This is too absurd—your not having a moment free by day or night. In fact: it won't do. So when, and where?

Letter to Norman

For weeks and months longer "weary office-worker" went on putting things like this into French: "Yesterday, at 17 hours, our troops advanced E. by N.E. taking one and a half kilometres of open ground". "Choke-points" in American—did that mean "bottle-necks", "traffic-jams" or something to do with a throttle? What was the Hook of Holland in French? Not even the B.B.C., rung up at three a.m., could say. Such matters, I told you, were now my horizon—behind which, at some unspecified time, I *hoped*, lay France.

With Christmas came some agreeable dinners—a particularly fine one in Dr Armando Child's house—firelight on old silver and firelit reflections between the three of us on Italy. And a veritable Maecenas one (for he had made an art of generously-extended pleasure) with Geoffrey Hobson, the director of Sotheby's, in that exquisite house of his in Chelsea. After the cocktails in jade cups and surprises for the palate tucked into diverse enveloping riches, much pleasant conversation here with him and his son Anthony, and Herman Schrijver. And was it not about now, that I introduced you and Lindsay Drummond to each other, so as to discuss his publishing a book of yours?

It seemed as if it *would* be the last war-Christmas.

7 Southwell Gdns. 21 Dec, 1944

Wrote you this morning. Viva and Willie King beg you to come to luncheon there: 15 Thurloe Place, on Monday—Turkey and all the rest of it. I said I would do my best to persuade you, if you were free. Anyhow, we meet Sunday—if not at 4-6 at Desmond's, then here at 6.30. Lots of love and damn this bloody Christmas.

No begging, indeed, was needed, but I was caught up in one of those "choke-points" and so that day, as usual, merely the hurried snack-bar for me.

And then Christmas itself—that frightful one of 1944! Blackly freezing, heavy with the bad news of Arnhem (the end of the war thus delayed ?), the general gauntness all round, the fog, the

Wartime and After

lack of food . . . Well, someone had to volunteer to do those two Christmas shifts—and why not I?

It was interesting from sheer cussedness. Could the thing even be done? That is, the *whole lot* of the work that three people usually spent eight hours at? To my amazement, it just could—with two minutes over by the clock wherein to make a hurried computation: how many words had I put on the typewriter into French? About 7,000. At the end, my mind admitted of exactly three straightforward needs: a strong drink first, a good rest with a little food, and the best company à deux. I could have all this! For we had settled that *our* Christmas dinner should be in the Brasserie of the Café Royal. But now wave upon wave of fog travelled up in the darkness; no buses, no taxis, silence utter and complete. And you, miles away in Kensington, really unable to manage the Tube on account of your health, and the fog on top of that. And somehow we could never telephone each other.

I went to the Café—how empty it was—sitting there in a stupor almost too weary to eat alone. Some miracle might yet waft you here. But the being who approached me as I sat in my trance, wondering dimly if you (and I) would live to see Italy and France again, was a drunken American journalist, eager to open heart, mind and pocket. My friends the waiters knew the right technique, however, and they won his attention away: “Just time for *another* drink, sir, before closing!” Next day I did the same thing all over again in the office and, on coming home, found this from you:

7 Southwell Gdns. 26 Dec, 1944

Dearest, I wonder if you expected me yesterday. I could not have reached you save by walking, and I should have walked, but for the fog which I can't handle. So I stayed here and had no dinner at all—not even a sandwich—and quite alone with my thoughts, which are particularly disagreeable at this season. Ghosts everywhere! Now, when and where?

Wherever it was next, you told me “One spoonful of honey—one!” Such had been your Christmas-night fare.

Letter to Norman

The criminal imbecility of wars—we had a lot to say about that some time later in Christmas week, on a background of tipsy soldiery in the Bodega back of the Café Royal.

“Could not all these international fights *really* be settled by some form of negotiation?”, I asked you.

“Could? Of course they could! But they won’t be. There’ll be another war after this, and then another, *and* another—pah!”

(Ah—those “scratches on the rocks” of yours . . . that apt remark of Einstein’s: “I don’t know what weapons World War 3 will be fought with. But those used in World War 4 will be stone clubs”.)

The turn of the year brought the great turn in events and now I was snowed under with the reports of the beginning of the agony of Berlin and other German cities, which no one in the office seemed anxious to translate. And my plea to go to France to do some press-articles was at length going successfully. I had often said to you in all the turmoil of news last August that I felt the end of the war would be in sight as soon as the liberation of France began. Now was the time to start my own private campaign; one, obviously, would have to be built up so as to get me back there! As I work at writing and as France is my home, what *could* be more legitimate than to do some writing on France for different English reviews? Starting with *The New Statesman*, it was chance unadulterated that took me to its office the very morning of the second—or Mediterranean—landings, in August—there that I heard the news, asking, at that very moment, if I might do some articles. But no; nothing doing at *The New Statesman*. And soon after this began my work at SHAEF.

What had been happening to the French national art-works during Occupation and devastation? Surely that was a matter, among others, of the greatest magnitude? In short, I thought of Dr Borenus, editor of *The Burlington Magazine*, and an old friend, although not met for years. He came to see me at once, and there we sat, both of us wan and weary from office-work, in my rickety, bomb-shaken room in Jermyn Street—and

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naught to offer him but a cup of coffee. How grim and cold was all of this December; how symbolic—said he—of life nowadays . . . Yes, yes, he would accredit me . . . Alas, nothing would ever be the same again. We sat huddled over my small electric-heater. No, nothing—And in process of sad talk and nostalgic memories, he thought he discerned a palm-tree in the concave curve . . . It was but a tiny breath of grease from my solitary, clandestine cooking, yet it caused him to sigh mightily for such far-away, inaccessible strands. Certainly, certainly I should do articles for him—on art—in France . . . Thanks also to Peter Watson and Cyril Connolly of *Horizon*, and to those of *Our Time*, there were now three accreditations and, after a mere three months of complete suspense, they were approved. And the more we talked of *your* longing to get to Italy or France, the more I thought that some such course would lead you to the point I had now reached—to Miss McLeod of the British Council, who with my accreditations, was sympathetically backing my plea. Might she not turn the minds of the authorities to the thought that so distinguished and famous an author as yourself, should certainly be permitted—nay—*encouraged* to describe a few things in France and Italy? If only you would see the effort to be made in this light! We had a nice moment with Miss McLeod—yet alas, it was I alone, and not the two of us, who took that strangely-muted train one dark night at Victoria on February 27. As it crept to the coast, during the all-night wait on board, the long rough passage and the still lengthier railway journey through French fields where so much had happened during the five and a half years (this was not even the main line to Paris any more), I wondered not only *when* and *where* but even *if* we should ever meet again. Of that return to France I spare you all my feelings but one: I could have wept that we were not doing this together.

* * * * *

Impossible to find words for the atmosphere in Paris, the “new ways”, the emotion of it all! What had *not* died during the years of betrayal and defeat and passion and resurgence? Faltering and

Letter to Norman

Lazarus-like, how bitter-bitter-sweet *to me* was that exultation of return. And even in a quite material sense, how could you or anyone else realise what conditions were now like in the way of transport and communications and so on?—as your reply to my card sent immediately on arrival indicated:

7 Southwell Gdns., March 17, 1945

I have only just—half an hour ago—received your card of the 28th. I could have walked to Paris and back in that time. I don't know how the days pass, as I can't bring myself to do any kind of work. They have sent me very high-class copies (three) of my Summer Islands which the Corvinus Press printed; the Penguin edition of Together is also out, and has made me very homesick to read again. I am now all alone in here. My people have gone to their country-place for a week or two; who cares! I have been to Oxford for the day lately and have seen Levy (who is in bed with rheumatism (?)) but seems quite cheerful) and also Rosenthal and his wife. I wonder where you are living, and how. What about food? Would it be of any use if I tried to send you some coffee? What I sent to Antibes apparently never arrived. The town is full of those bourgeois daffodils just now. Saw Desmond Ryan lately. I'm bored stiff and shall try to turn over another page tomorrow and do some writing. But what about?

You and I had sat under those lindens at Réanville one year and two months before the catastrophe began and now I was faced with the shambles. Not a door, not a window remained . . . Everything I had was here, and now almost all was gone. Jean and Georgette Goasguën, those two of such true heart, to whom I owe all that does remain, had risked their very lives in saving what they could. And, as they began to collect and hand over all they had hidden, they told me shaking with indignation of the evil mayor—*still* mayor at that very moment. He, and none other, must be held responsible; he had left my house open to all after taking the keys from them, threatening to denounce them to the Germans if they went on protecting my belongings. French reservists first . . . wandering waves of refugees and looters at different times . . . lastly the German soldiers billeted there, who



N D and the author at the Villa Tuoro, October 1949

1949

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had burned and destroyed every object except some books. The mayor (protector of *other* properties) had said it was "a very good house for them to be in"; at one moment, he had tried to sell it too, but was deterred by the broadcasts from England that such dealings would entail due punishment later. The spate of description raced on for days . . .

Invisible blood and tears of ravaged books and pictures! Here, a drawing by Wyndham Lewis under a tree . . . There, among scattered pieces of type and shreds of African beading under the straw that all soldiers leave behind, were some fragments of coral, hammered to smithereens. What else among them but a leaf from that pastoral brooch you had given me once in Florence? The Germans had ceremoniously burned the whole set of last-century *Punch* on the grass, before stoning all my pieces of African sculpture that were still left and blazing them up in the kitchen stove. Stabbed papers, wounds and mutilations everywhere—the little printery with its heavy old beam sawn in two and the roof taken off—although the old Mathieu Press had defied them. On another out-building, the words *Achtung, Waffen!* The deep well fouled with excrement, a dead sheep, some books, smashed china and other fragments were in it yet. The German commander, gazing at my two abstract paintings by Tanguy and Malkine, had said he would hang me *if only* he could lay hands on me.

"*Tu sembles être une pillouère née*"—Georgette murmured, using the Breton word for *scavenger* as I raked through everything for days, coming across a few of your books, our Tunisian snapshots, the last copy of *One Day* (the unsigned edition this time) duly stamped, as was all else, with the hobnail mark of the beast.

I had not many thoughts for anything or anyone at this time, except that which occurred at frequent intervals: What of all *your* things in Florence—was it a shambles there too, after the blowing-up of the Arno bridges each side, the probable loot and pillage?

7 Southwell Gdns., March 22, 1945

When we were in Tunis, you wrote something about the country

Letter to Norman

for an English periodical. Can you tell me where I could consult this material? I shall see Desmond tonight and show him what you wrote about Huit-Clos, etc.

And soon came:

Just a scrawl to introduce Capt. Fitzgibbon, who is a kind of grand-nephew of mine, and, as such, obviously charming. He stays only a week in Paris which he knows well, but I thought you two might manage a drink together somewhere.

We did indeed, lamenting that you were not with us. Surely the fact of your owning property in Florence? . . . Yet such a fact, once again, was apparently the worst plea that could be made. But why?

Same address, (a little later)

It is quite clear what to say at the Ministry. I am delaying, as I may have a book ready in about two months; shall know more in a week. But how about money in France? How did you get your luggage over? Thanks for news about your Tunis articles. Awful about Réanville.

7 Southwell Gardens, 20 May, 1945

My desire is to have done with that blasted book Late Harvest which is now, thank God, almost finished. Should be finished altogether in about 10 days and will be then sent to the Authors Society, who will look for a publisher. I can't be bothered to run after these damned people any more. It was frightfully kind of you to take all the trouble to copy out the letter about my flat, and I am terribly sorry, alas, to hear such bad accounts of your place. I suppose we ought to be grateful to be allowed to live! The funny thing is I can get no answer from Emilio to my letters, which he evidently does not receive, since he wired me the other day, "Attendo sue notizie". Some confusion here. And what do our authorities mean by putting an Italian fascist into my flat? Of course he will clear out such loot as the fascists have left. My idea was to get to Italy as soon as possible and sell that flat so as to have some money in hand. For all I know, our people have given him a long lease, and, in every case, I shall have

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difficulty in getting him out. I shall write to my lawyer in Florence about this, and also to a friend at our Embassy at Rome. Do get hold of more news if you can. If only somebody could manage to see Emilio personally and ask him what pieces of property the fascists took away and what is still in his, Emilio's, hands. Not much difficulty, as he works for PWB. Of course I want to get to Italy which is much more important for me than Antibes. And I am ready to start tonight . . . I want to get to Florence as soon as possible, although Antibes would be better than not going anywhere: Florence is infinitely preferable.

Many were the letters we wrote each other all that summer—the most incoherent time in my life. What else was the feeling that came from every kind of frustration in “readjustment”, with the £ still at 200 and the whole material side of life conditioned, made impossible, by lack of money? It seemed out of the question, as summer months progressed and prices rose, to get anything started again—or any other phrase of the kind that will cover the chaos. Where, for one, where to live? Such was the immediate aftermath. And you . . .

7 Southwell Gdns., 24 June, 1945

. . . As to Italy—I wish I could manage it, or Antibes! . . . I spend half my days now in climbing stairs and asking people whether they have a room to let. A dog's life . . . Instead of my becoming used to this country, I get more homesick every day. Went for a solitary walk down the Serpentine this afternoon. Yesterday for a solitary walk in Battersea Park. And soon I shall be too old to knock about trains, etc., by myself. And today is midsummer. Makes me sadder than ever. I am all alone here just now . . .

How understandably unhappy, all of these letters:

46 Thurloe Square, 4 Aug, 1945

. . . As to Florence—of course I would go there today if I could. Seems to be still out of the question. But I am now going to make a frontal attack. France would be easier on account of my Fountains in the Sand, but once there, should I ever get into Italy? That is a

Letter to Norman

question. My people in Antibes have kept a room for me all these years, and write and ask me why on earth I don't come to France "now that the war is over?" I explained the position in a long letter (which they seem not to have received) and ended by saying that at this moment there was not a single tourist in France, and that I could only go as a tourist. No news of Florence except that Emilio seems to be doing well. I can get no definite information yet about my flat . . .

My new book, *Late Harvest*, is finished and the Authors Society are trying to find me a publisher with paper. The new edition of *Almanac* not yet out. I wonder whether you are at Souillac? Your account of the food situation was not encouraging. Food here seems to have become less and worse. I live in a state of chronic semi-starvation. That would be quite endurable, if I could see any prospect of getting away. It is now 3 and a half years since I arrived from Lisbon, and they have been among the most melancholy of my life—which I feel is slipping away so quickly (as regards strength, etc.) that soon I may not be physically able to manage the journey. I miss you so much!

Same address, 20 Aug, 1945

. . . France-Italy? I have not the energy (77) to take all those steps. A broken reed . . .

It seemed almost heartless to write and tell you of the loveliness of the French countryside, scant as it was, in food. Of the joy mingled with sadness I felt in the land. Of the emotion that filled my days, now in various parts of the South West where I had old ties and Spanish ones as well. You would be having the same thoughts about Italy. If only we could be together in, say, the Dordogne valley or the Lot, where I had recently been, at Figeac. Did you know these regions?

Same address, 30 Aug, 1945

. . . Of course I know Figeac. I spent a night there on my return high-bicycle trip from Paris to the Mediterranean in 1889. They gave me some delicious greenish-yellow wine.

Wartime and After

And *still* I went on thinking that you should "attack frontally" with the suggestion that you would write something about the immediate post-war on the continent—a useless thought which drew your rapid reply: "*I can't be bothered to write articles for anybody. Wait till you are my age!*" Moreover, Basil Leng was giving you news about Antibes:

An account of prices there, which, if true—and he never exaggerates—would make it quite impossible to me to live in that country on my present income.

In England, more restrictions than ever, or so it seemed. Yet "Come to London if you can", said a letter. "We will have a Christmas meeting more successful than that foggy one!"

I went, briefly, and thought I could now feel a certain hopefulness about you—although that "God alone knows when—and He won't tell" was on your lips.

Same address, 27 Feb, 1946

. . . As to Italy—my plan at present (which may be altered from one moment to the next) is to begin the attack on the 1st March with applying for a renewal of my passport and asking for an interview with the cultural relations man at the Italian Embassy. After that, visas for France and Italy . . . When all is ready, I propose to go to Paris for 2–3 days, staying with Bill Curteis who has invited me; then to Antibes to pick up some valuable books and papers of mine, and so to Naples where I have two people who will put me up while I look in the neighbourhood for some convenient hole in which to die when the time comes. I'll let you hear how these negotiations proceed . . . Needless to say that it would suit me very well if I could travel with you! As things are, I would NOT go first to Florence. Many thanks for what you tell me about the Obelisk Press. I wrote them on the 19th, and have not yet an answer. Sylvia Beach might know more about them, as you say. Anyhow, he told me quite frankly that the edition was sold out. And I told him quite frankly that I had not received a cent!

This—an edition of the *Limericks* authorised by you before the war—seemed one of those threads it would be impossible to pick

Letter to Norman

up. Such were my thoughts as I strove to get some sense for you out of this press in Paris whose name and character were now quite different. The blank look, natural or otherwise, on the face of the heir-in-business to the director you had dealt with betokened nothing hopeful.

46 Thurloe Square, London, March 26, 1946

. . . I wrote to the Obelisk yesterday and asked them what they are going to do about it. If there is any difficulty in sending money here, I would gladly authorise you to accept it on my behalf and keep it until we meet again. They should, of course, produce a regular account. As to Italy, the prospects seem no brighter. The important man at the Italian delegation has not even deigned to answer my request for an interview. I am going there personally today.

46 Thurloe Square, London, April 11, 1946

. . . I think I shall have to write off the Obelisk debt, because D— lost my copy of the contract! But I know that, (1) I am entitled to 25 per cent of the proceeds, and, (2) I have not yet received one cent for them.

“What can we do?”—the director of the Obelisk now said to me.

“Find the accounts and pay Monsieur Douglas!”

“Ah, the war . . .” he sighed. All accounts are gone; everything is confusion.”

And the outcome of it all was nil.

Could you meanwhile suggest a good French version for the title of my book Looking Back? My own brain is in an advanced state of putrefaction . . .

you wrote about this time.

Yes—what about some of your books being translated into French? We had heard sporadically during the war of an edition of *South Wind*, but you were inclined to think of this as something quite mythical for it was impossible to trace; no name of editor, of translator, not even the exact title in French had ever been forthcoming. Was it a piece of pirating, or some confusion

Wartime and After

with another work?*

And yes, what, if anything, was happening about the rights of *South Wind* for Spain, that José Janes, a publisher in Barcelona, had written you for in 1942? Only later did I hear (without much surprise, remembering the kind of Spanish censorship now in force) that the project had been promptly banned.

On April 11, 1946, you wrote me:

I should prefer Calmann-Lévy to any other French publisher and I certainly want to have my books translated. But one is completely in the hands of one's agents (and if one weren't one would get swindled right and left!).

After many more letters on the difficulty of leaving England—one of which said that an English owner of Italian estates had only just got permission to go to them “by some underground method which he refuses to reveal”—came that most welcome one of May 30 with its calm announcement:

. . . I shall be passing through Paris in about a fortnight. I arrive Gare du Nord at 6.45 p.m. and leave Gare de Lyons at 10.20 p.m. Can we meet if I send you a wire? I should love that, especially if you came to meet the train. Do reply at once, if you are in Paris.

Yet the perversity of things! Having been in Paris, hopefully expecting you since February, I was now at Bourg Madame and other Pyrenean frontier places, doing a series of special articles for a French paper. But Gare de Lyons sounded like Antibes! I could certainly go on there, if it suited you.

Alas no. A business-like note on June 17, saying you would be well looked after during those hours in Paris.

But the journey to Naples is going to be awful. I leave Friday the 21st, and my address will be: Co British Consulate-General, Naples, Italy.

Glad to get out anyway.

* Cecil Woolf, the Bibliographer, and I have now ascertained the existence of *Au Vent du Sud*, published in 1945, of which the publisher, Raymond Picquot, wrote me that it is a novel by Gil Reicher and Osmin Ricau on the Basque country and now out of print.

Letter to Norman

Five words on a line, separate to the rest—like a stamp, not more, on those “Three and a half years among the most melancholy of my life”.

Naples—that must mean Capri? If things there or on the mainland were as in France it would be difficult to take up life again as a continuation after the break—although if anyone could manage to make such a feeling come into being, it would certainly be you. At any rate, you would be all right now; little by little war and all of its train would recede—the optimistic thought-wish of then (as, at times, of now)! You would soon be in a good, matter-of-fact mood in Capri, as happy even, as was relatively possible; more so than most? Especially if you could settle the matter of the apartment in Florence. Yes, Capri was where I liked to think of you best. And although we wrote not so much to each other these times I knew I would go and see you there later.

7 Unghia Marina, Capri, Prov Napoli,
21 Nov, 1946

I am now settled in this tiny place which has been lent me by a friend, and is quite comfortable. I look out on to the cliffs of Anacapri through olives. The Piazza is about 10 minutes away, and I have the same cook I had 43 years ago, in 1903, and next Sunday shall be having a little Neapolitan boy of 10 to help and run messages. Doing no work. Can't get the Italian family out of my Florence flat—not yet! Emilio came to see me for 10 days in the summer at Positano. He had a very bad time with the Fascists—10 months in prison, and then a concentration camp . . . My book Late Harvest is just out and I should send you a copy if I knew where you were.

Another letter made one gasp at the prices on Capri—obviously the start of that overpowering wave of commercialism that has engulfed the island:

7 Unghia Marina, Capri, 1 Jan, 1947
This is the first letter I write in the New Year to yours of Dec 22

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received yesterday—may it bring us both good luck, such as we certainly deserve. It is a preposterous state of affairs that I can't get my Florence flat back. If I could, I might sell it and with the money buy some small place here. As a matter of fact, there is only one for sale in the whole place. It consists of 3 rooms with a tiny garden, and they won't take less than 1,700,000 Lire (one million, seven hundred thousand) which of course I haven't got. I am living above my income, and my only consolation is that my capital may last out till I die. Prices are so fantastic here that for the first time in history there was a general strike. It is quite impossible, with the strictest economy and living rent-free, as I do, to manage on less than 35/- a day. Everything is black market, including boys and girls. The Americans are chiefly responsible. They are still here, and their blasted jeeps and camions are the curse of the island. Emilio had a very bad time during the war, and just escaped being shot (as the servant of an Englishman). He had 10 months in prison and after that a concentration camp where the Allies found him. All letters from England complain of everything out there—even Neil Hogg has begun to grumble. Here we have sunshine and blue sky, but you can't make a dinner off that . . . No; I hope never to leave Italy again. Am growing very feeble—79! and not doing work of any kind!

7 Unghia Marina, Capri, Feb 3, 1947

. . . The Americans are said to be leaving today. Good riddance. Nightmarish people! Glad to hear you sold Réanville. I am in the same position as you and shall probably never get a place wherein to gather my scattered belongings. Those Florentine people simply refuse to clear out of my flat in spite of Embassy and all the rest of it. Since 1941 they have paid less than £5 a year, whereas, if I could let it, I should get £5 a week at a day's notice. Most disheartening. Prices here are still going up, and not only in food. A tumble-down three-roomed cottage has just been sold for £5,500 (Pounds, not Lire). Even so, I prefer Capri to England although I am living far beyond my income. You must tell me your impressions of London. Perfectly awful in every sense of the word, I expect . . .

It was—the more so because during my visit the great frost

Letter to Norman

there seemed to knit every kind of difficulty more firmly yet into the very fabric of a country exhausted by war—but bearing up, bearing up. Back again in France, without any kind of “home” . . . Réanville sold none too well in all its ruin . . . inventories made from memory of things that had disappeared . . . legal expenses . . . the lawsuit against the mayor dismissed: “without sufficient proof” . . . all I had left in warehouses, cases and boxes widely dispersed . . . frustration, effort, long spells of solitude. You would have hated a detailed letter from me these times! How distant you seemed—and were. In a sort of southern glow . . . And, ah—this was great good news about Kenneth Macpherson, and about Emilio too:

7 Unghia Marina, Capri, 2 June, 1947

. . . Warm here now (after being frozen in winter) and I fear this miserable little room will be an oven presently. My hope is that Kenneth Macpherson may find a villa here: I should then be all right. That Florentine flat of mine still occupied by Italians (since 1941) who simply refuse to move out; neither my lawyer nor our Embassy in Rome have been able to do anything, and of course I have not had one penny of rent. Emilio is presently coming here to be Kenneth's servant for good. I hear from Davenport and Neil Hogg now and then. Archie has gone to Kenya and will probably end in Cape Town. The address of Hutch is Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, U.S.A. I have not heard from him for ages! The £ is standing at lire 2,200, and the Bank of England forced me to change at lire 900. A nice mess! There is no white market here at all. Not writing anything. Not likely!

“Dislocated by war”—you had said of someone after that of 1914–18. How exactly this now fitted me, even when out of Europe for nine months, although finding a tumble-down cottage in South West France on return afforded a measure of material background again. That would lead to a small house of my own soon. If you would ever come to it? But no, I thought with a sigh—our little times together are over. You would never leave Italy again, your life by now running easily and happily in the

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Villa Tuoro (where you had your own separate apartment and lived, one heard, in great comfort), with Kenneth Macpherson—so aptly described to me later by an Italian as “il colmo della gentilezza”—the apex of niceness.

Yes, Capri was where you should live—if only it could be “for ever more”. And it was now that Roger Senhouse’s spoken tribute to you on the B.B.C. aroused such well-merited admiration—going out as it did in December 1948 on the occasion of your eightieth birthday.

But there was also the awful news that Emilio had been killed in a plane accident in Italy, although it was not you who wrote me this.

The months passed and sporadically came a little news of you from various friends. Surely I could go to Capri and see you some time soon?

Villa Tuoro, Capri, 4 June, 1949

Thanks so much for your long and lovely letter of the 24 May. I can't write much, my hand is so bad and not likely, I fear, to get better, tho' it may well get worse. Let me know if you change your address. I am very groggy in health. Much love to Davenport (who I hope will come here) and all my other friends.

What was this about your hand, your state of health? A few who had been to Capri in the last two years said you appeared well, sat daily on the Piazza, in mellow and, at times, energetic mood, walking, conversing, and successfully avoiding being lionised by such time-wasters as wanted their sight and more of you.

Some time this summer John Davenport was beginning to plan a book: “certain aspects of Norman, certain aspects of his work” was, I think, the exact phrase, and I thought he would do it remarkably well, for during those war years in London you were often together. Indeed, when I saw you after you had left each other, such a mood was proof of the excellence of those hours! And then, as we had agreed, Davenport has a very good mind. He would know well about which “aspects” to write. Yes, I would definitely go and see you this autumn, unless you stopped me.

Letter to Norman

And so it came about, just after that spectacular International P.E.N. Club Congress in Venice conducted with such lavish brio by the Italian writers and the Italian Government. I had not been in Italy for twenty-one years and the impressions were sharp and complex—the extraordinary resurgence, the contrasts, the utterly different tempo it all has to that of France. How admirable, too, that I should see you again in Italy itself!

Villa Tuoro, Capri, 7 Sept, 1949

Just got yours of the 3rd, and I can't write much, as my hand is so troublesome. But do come here if you can! As you may know, I am living with Kenneth Macpherson, and we can't put up anyone here. Of course there are lots of hotels, but only a few cheap ones. Davenport wired me from Venice two days ago. I don't know whether he is still there. He says he comes here on the 10th, staying till 15 Sept. Boiling hot just now. No rain for 7 months.

I arrived, through the blare of loudspeakers and the throng of American sailors on the Marina, up the remembered funicular, but, although you had come to meet me—no Norman on top. And it was for the same old reason, the telegram delivered only next day . . .

Still the height of the season was it, this early October? So it would seem on the Piazza with its *mêlée* of thighs and bosoms and shorts and slips. To streak through it took no time and you had taken me a fragrant room in an hotel on the way to Villa Tuoro. A quick phone-call, and there we were, having dinner at the Ristorante Gemma, sitting afterwards in the *café* you liked best, the Vittoria, overlooking the Bay of Naples.

Well—as if yesterday! It was always like that after lengthy periods when we had not seen each other. And no! If you had aged a little, it was but in decorous proportion with the years since I left you last—a trifle more white, that amber streak or lock more pronounced in tone, one might say. And although you shook your head somewhat over your health, with dinner came animation. Life was all right here, you told me, and Villa Tuoro *very much* all right, as I would see. But Capri . . .

Wartime and After

"Capri is like Hollywood now—pah! As for the mainland, Sant' Agata and the heights above Sorrento—awful."

That one word, investigated, meant "Siren Land", as such, is no more. Ugly new buildings, ugly new people, and frightful new prices.

Villa Tuoro, elaborately beautiful as the result of perfect taste and lavish development of natural resources, its terraces embowered, its rooms ideally coloured and furnished, spacious and comfortable, remained a wonderfully private place. How was this so well managed, on the edge of the summer cauldron (the winter one, for all I knew, as well) of cosmopolitan visitors and tourists? An invisible spell might have been laid around it like a guard. I saw you there alone the first time, in the ravishing four rooms or so you had on the lower floor, quite separate from, yet part of the delectable villa. An ideal arrangement! Your own cook, your own establishment entirely; the enchanting company of Kenneth and of Islay above when so disposed. Long low rooms, shaded or light at will. Book-filled, everything in perfect order. Ah! Here was the great yellow marble tortoise from Baia, certainly one of the finest pieces of sculpture imaginable; fancy digging *that* up in one's own grounds as you had long ago! What a find, what a find. And that gorgeous lapis-lazuli dagger-hilt from Persia, and the lovely ancient bowls and plaques. So not all had been looted in Florence, praise be! Thanks to your energy and Kenneth's wonderful friendship and gift for organisation, this was a perfect setting, happy and full of leisure.

But—your health? You were certainly not infirm! Indeed, you walked the short mile, with its innumerable terraced steps, to the Piazza, as a rule twice a day, and back. And the Arco Naturale . . . That is where you took me strolling one evening at exactly the right time, an hour before sunset, from where the long Salernian mainland can be seen as it lies fainting in a swathe of palest blue. Good wine was in the tiny café, Pepinella's Cave, at the end of that path, and a friendly woman to serve it. How much the Capresi did like you; there were still a good many about whom you knew in the old days and Capri had

Letter to Norman

not suffered at all during the war. A few good *new* people were on the island too, you told me. And if only Emilio had not been killed, I thought . . . The way you spoke of it, briefly, showed how tragic this had been, and remained, to you.

Sunday

Dearest, Waited here all the morning. After lunch I go to sleep (doctor's orders). I shall be in the Piazza at 4.30 sharp, and shall wait there till 4.45 in case you care to come and drive up to Anacapri. Dining at Restaurant Gemma at 7.30 sharp. Love, N.

The note was put into my hand on the path as I hurried, apparently somewhat late, to fetch you. Now who . . . *who* was this charming, gentle and intriguing Englishman who murmured, ruminatingly, "We used to know each other in the old days . . ." ? Arthur Johnson! Seen last in Paris perhaps as much as twenty years ago. An Admirable lunch with him followed, during which we talked of you so much that I realised he must be one of those "good *new* ones" on Capri that you had mentioned, although he had not been living here so long as yet. How well you knew each other later: those protracted literary—and other—conversations! Not only did the three of us dine together that night up on Anacapri in the little restaurant that faces Naples and Ischia across the sea, but there were many drinks in the evenings together in the cafés on the edge of the summer cauldron, "all their outrageous prices be *damned!*".

Although you told me one day "The doctor says there's no immediate cause for alarm; he also says my trouble is *slow, progressive and incurable*",—which made me shudder at the thought of some form of paralysis, perhaps—there was no visible sign to others that anything was wrong. And certainly no deterioration in your intellect—not for one second! Even that rather fussy and unmerited stricture about my "restlessness" was to burst from you on one occasion with the vigour of old.

It was "those beastly gondoliers" that touched it off . . .

What, *of no account* to me in my journey was the fact that, after twenty-one years and all that had been, I should now be

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trying to learn as much as possible about Italy, and Venice in particular? You did not think I should attempt to come and settle on Capri, did you? No! Well, is that "restlessness"?

The gondola question in Venice—troubled mainspring of the whole life of the city—I can hear you yet, expostulating that I had "got all interested now in those beastly gondoliers!"

Yet, with the usual kindness, you undertook a little task for me that I should not have bothered you with; something, I thought, that would take a mere two minutes:

"Norman, could you dictate me the briefest letter in proper Italian to the Sindaco—the mayor of Venice?"

"What on earth for?"

"I have to make a formal, written request to be allowed to attend one of their councils when I return to Venice—on 'the adjustment of gondoliers' prices with what the public can afford to pay'. I want to get that side of it clear, as well as the gondolier's point of view. And I have also promised my good Angelo, found again there after all these years, that I would . . ."

I looked at you dubiously:

"Oh! Do let's leave it, by all means."

But by then you had already got out pen and paper, and a beautifully formal request was being drafted.

("Rushing about" . . . Alas that I shall never hear *that* again, no matter how undeservedly.)

Davenport had been here not long ago. And had he worked much, and asked you all sorts of questions? Could I hear a little of what you thought of the project?

Not in communicative mood that morning:

"He looked at a great many books . . ."

A noncommittal silence followed—and then a strange expression came into your face, suggestive partly of resignation and partly of something that seemed like pushing the subject away, as you murmured:

"Let 'em write what they like, my dear—let 'em, let 'em . . ."

The words sounded to me as if you were done with this sort

Letter to Norman

of thing, almost indifferent . . . And why did they, more than anything else said by you while I was here, bring the tears so close to my eyes?—words that might come from someone soon going away, his mind on other things already . . .

And to whom was it you put the matter this way:

“I suppose *a regular rash* of nonsense will come out after I am dead!”

Can it have been to him?

I think I saw you five or six times at the Villa Tuoro itself, where, after innumerable years, it was good to meet Kenneth again, and to see Islay for the first time, Islay de Courcy Lyons, whose charm and sense of humour delighted me, and who, thanks to his excellence as a photographer, has certainly recorded you “in all moods”.

And in the best of them, to which I am a witness.

That lunch at Villa Tuoro, about October 10—what an apotheosis!

The word has never come to me before as the exact one for any specific occasion. Now why did it seem just that? Because everything was complete and perfect, I suppose, around the spontaneous inthronisation of yourself that day—the mood of all present, the wonderful good fare and wine, the sun, the warmth, the flowers, all centered around you.

And such laughter . . . Whoever wrote of Norman Douglas as “*a sun of laughter*” should have been recompensed anew with the sight of it, *then*.

What can the talk have been about?

Perhaps, at one moment, of eccentricities? No—all of it is gone and I can remember nothing—nor do Kenneth and Islay, nor yet does Arthur Johnson.

On that terrace, with Capri’s shimmer off to one side by the Certosa, the sea far away below on the other, and the sort of “aura” of crystalline whiteness I thought I could almost *see* sparkling around you—now at the end of the long lunch, sundry

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cameras and reflectors, long coils and other apparatus came into play, as Islay moved nimbly from spot to spot, catching this and that angle of it all, as the laughter went on and on, your sallies coming out—smack—one on top of another, and every one a winner. And I swear there was, at one moment, the chirr of the movie-camera. Where was that dictaphone? Maybe there was one today, hidden in some discreet clump of flowers? Never before, or since, have I thought one so necessary—catch, oh catch and perpetuate the jewelled moment for ever!

It must be from long habit, obviously, that you and Kenneth had such a wonderful flow of inter-repartee! And, as Arthur Johnson tipped in some quiet spontaneous barb, with a shaft now and then coming from Islay (all busy with his machines), I thought that our laughter must be heard as far away as the Faraglione Rocks, or maybe it was echoing on and on around the whole island.

Such was the last time but one—it seems to me—that I saw you.

And the last time . . . was what?

That sunny morning at noon. Leaning on the old friendly stick, you came very, very slowly down three or four steps at Villa Tuoro to where the rest of us were sitting, a piece of rather unaccountable light stuff loosely round your shoulders in the breeze; on your head—of all things—a pale, floppy cotton summer hat, such as fishermen wear, and you were silent. I had never seen you like this before. Such was the vision, all of it in light, pale tones, that I know my thought murmured itself out loud: "A Rembrandt in white . . .!" It was a very beautiful moment—one for me alone, probably, for the others would, no doubt, be accustomed to seeing you like this.

I do not know what we said; nothing in particular, I should imagine, beyond the fact that, yes, I was going away—that it had been good to see each other again.

It might be the last time—indeed, the last . . .

I phoned you just before the boat left, from some café where the noise was considerable. And, although I could not hear you very well, beyond a detached "You're off, are you?" the last

Letter to Norman

words of all did seem to have rather a sound of "Well, ta-ta, my dear, ta-ta . . ."

* * *

And now, how am I to think of you, those last years of all?

Kenneth has evoked them vividly in his beautiful *Omnes Eodem Cogimur*; he has told me yet more. It is a loving record of some of your quips and jokes, with snatches of conversation and several apt remarks on music—highly individual! The rhythm of Villa Tuoro is here, and of the pleasant side of Capri, with people as different and interesting and animated as Cecil Gray, the historian of music, and Gracie Fields, and Graham Greene.

There was that plan then too for making a film out of *South Wind*, the scenario or necessary transformations to be in the hands of Graham Greene.

Looking at Islay's record of you in photographs, I ask myself if I have ever seen so many of one person? Of course not! Of you alone: some careful studies; of you with Cecil Gray: happy conversation pieces. You in your *béret* and a great Scotch plaid rug (very successful those, a sort of "grand old man of science" look about them). Others of sunny picnics on the heights of Anacapri with the Marchesa Torregiani, Kenneth, and David Jeffreys. Of you and Arthur Johnson. You with Somerset Maugham, with Letizia Cerio, with Ingrid Bergman and Rossellini. Yet more: moonlight effects on midnight reflections—the sun caught in a discursive glass of wine. Here is that lovely one you sent me on December 7, 1950, beginning a new year:

"For darling Nancy, with ten thousand good wishes from Norman aged 10 and 83"—the thoughtful man with his cigar seated behind the bust in marble, one hand laid on its shoulder, of a handsome, decided little boy.

And two more books of yours, even, were in the making. Modest, indeed, is the title *Footnote on Capri* for this excellent offering of all the essentials of the island which begins with the words "Not long ago I thought to have closed up my little writing-shop for good and all. A glance at these admirable

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photographs has made me change my mind." A fine conjunction, this, of your knowledge and the photographic skill of Islay Lyons. And what of *Venus in the Kitchen*, with 'Pilaff Bey's' merry little Preface, the intriguing if obscure illustration by 'an English painter' (!), D. H. Lawrence, and the complicated and stimulating recipes that, on the whole, must make all but the most patient epicure despair of achieving? I can almost hear you: "No harm in trying . . ." As for that fussy little moment—the Mediterranean breeze in the typescript pages as you corrected them in a café—the evocation of this in Graham Greene's Introduction here has a physical touch of perfection.

Other literary work was going on, when Constantine Fitz-Gibbon was with you for over a year assembling material for a Biography ("You can write whatever you like about me, so long as it's the truth").

Wishful thinking—I know—to visualise you as "entirely happy" (a ridiculous expression anyway) these last years, although immensely more so than during the war and away from Italy. Emilio's death . . . a considerable measure of ill and uncertain health . . . and yet, as one sees, occupied. Am I wrong in thinking that your botanical knowledge further enriched the garden at Villa Tuoro?—where that bright clump of sapphire by the top steps is, as you would remark, "*not* lobelia, although everyone thinks it is—but a native of the island, growing wild, high up in rock-crevices". And there was Ettore, the little Neapolitan saved by you some time earlier in a street-fight with other rough boys in Naples, taken on to help in your apartment—Ettore, that handful and more.

Very many were those who came to see you: your sons Archie and Robin, Viva and Willie King, Harold Acton several times, and John Davenport again, Dr Stella Churchill, Eric and his wife, Sibyl Bedford, that appreciative Scottish bibliophile and collector of your works, Alan Anderson, and how many others. I see you strolling and talking with that sympathetic Austrian painter,

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Schmidt, and often ensconced in the luxuriant comfort of the Molino a Vento of the Arthur Johnsons at Anacapri; the talk has run far, far into the night between such connoisseurs as you of good writing and human nature—erudition evoked all the better for the perfectly-poured brandy! I see you with that most intelligent and sympathetic Caprese, Edwin Cerio, who has written with such finesse of your books, the talk between you is in Italian. And now, to be sure, you are an honorary citizen of Capri and Benedetto Croce is the only other. I see you relishing and pointing out some comical detail in one of those saintly island processions that cannot have changed much since the days of *South Wind*, and even far back of it.

I thought all the more of you when in Algeria, for those rocks and tones in the desert, those strolls through oasis-gardens, that strange mixture of old Arab ways and French modernity should all have been enjoyed *with you* as once before:

(On the back of a remarkable photograph of you and Carmolina)

Capri, 20 Feb, 1951

Dearest Nancy, Just got your delightful card from Bou-Saada, and I wish I were there too, instead of having to content myself with Isabelle Eberhardt's fine description. So glad you liked the photo. Here is another of myself and the once-famous tarantella dancer, Carmolina, whom I had known for fifty years and who killed herself last July 30th. As to my being in sun and comfort, the weather has been absolutely foul, and my health is now such that I wonder how much longer I can stand it. A really rotten state of affairs, though I suppose one must expect something at 83. And I never thanked you for your kind words in Life and Letters Today. What is your address in Souillac? I hope you will stay there and as little as possible in England! Heaps of love, always your Norman.

This summer began the compilation of that large, meticulous *Bibliography* of all your work by Cecil Woolf in London, of which one of his letters to me said "I have Norman's blessing, but not assistance".

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And in August came a stage production of *South Wind*, reported as "excellent", by the High Wycombe Repertory Co. Could we but have seen it together . . . but alas:

Isola Capri, 30 Sept, 1951

So glad to get yours of the 16, but I can't write much as my hand is bad, and I also have now difficulty in walking—in fact, the prognosis is not favourable for me, in spite of injections and other remedies. I hope you find your place satisfactory? . . . It has done me no end of good to hear from you again, dearest Nancy.

That winter I was in England, where various public efforts were now being made with the aim of averting and putting an end to all wars, for ever. Several hundred writers had signed their own appeal, and your old friend Compton Mackenzie was one. Just possibly . . . this clearly-expressed manifesto . . . well, I would send it you, anyway. The reply is the last word of all that I have from you:

Capri, 21 Nov, 1951

Dearest Nancy, Just got yours of the 16 and many thanks also for an earlier one from France. I can't write much as I am quite ill and they must do without my signature. (Did such Appeals ever do the slightest good?) I also feast on old memories, when I can!

Lots of love, Norman.

And then, ten weeks later—from erysipelas and complications—the irrevocable. They have told me that your last word—just one, said three times over—was "Love, Love, Love", wafted in half-conscious farewell to Kenneth and Islay.

Not only "without your signature". From now on, for all of us who loved you . . .

I do not know how to finish my letter, Norman. With the same rapid gesture, perhaps, as that with which they say Edwin Cerio, turning aside in sorrow at the end of his oration by your flower-laden coffin, cast upon it the sprig of an island-tree. The irrevocable has no fitting words; the emotion it brings must be translated into others.

Letter to Norman

And so I end, saying:

“Without you, *yet not without your personality* as it is written into all of your books.”

Of whom—in those words of Sheridan’s you loved so rightly to quote, “No man was ever written down except by himself”—of whom is this so paramountly and felicitously true?

And so, with love,

from N to N

III

APPRECIATIONS
BY
SEVERAL FRIENDS

1

Norman Douglas. 1868-1952^{*}

by Victor Cunard

I MET Norman Douglas first in Florence in 1922. At that time, his private life, about which he was neither communicative nor secretive, aroused an almost morbid curiosity amongst the inquisitive. He remained, however, utterly unconcerned about what was said of him and his complete indifference to impertinent gossip soon caused the legends that had grown up around his name to die of inanition.

I had, of course, read *South Wind* and heard some lurid inventions about its author before I met Douglas; but if I expected the *diavolo incarnato* of the Italian proverb, I was soon disillusioned. He was lunching at Betti's, the *trattoria* which, at that time, precariously enjoyed his patronage. He at once made me welcome, advised me what wine to order and warned me against those dishes I should avoid if I had "any respect for my stomach". Douglas regarded anybody who did not enjoy his food with contempt, and even suspicion, and his own taste was not easy to satisfy.

^{*} In *Time and Tide*, March 29, 1952.

Norman Douglas: 1868-1952

In moods of exasperation I have even thought that his preferences were based rather on prejudice than on discrimination. In a *trattoria* the personality of the *padrone* or the cook—to whom he would speak “like a father”—played, in my callow view, a disproportionate part and it seemed to me that what was sent away as “a greasy mess” in Florence was eaten with apparent relish in Rome. I see now the inadequacy of this opinion. Douglas immensely appreciated good food and good wine, but these were not, in themselves, enough to insure his enjoyment of a meal. Nobody but a fool would have offered him a “dinner of herbs”, but the “stalled ox”, however exquisitely cooked, was savourless to him if he were, even temporarily, out of sympathy with his companions, or dissatisfied with his surroundings.

Douglas was a remarkable linguist. Besides possessing a tolerable fluency in Russian, he knew German, French and Italian far more profoundly than many Englishmen who are said to speak these languages “like a native”. Of the languages I could understand, Italian seemed to convey most clearly and appropriately the peculiar qualities of his mind and heart: sceptical, precise and unsentimental, but sensitive, poetic and affectionate. To speak Italian “like a native”, however, was exactly what he did not do. Nobody could have accused him of having “an English accent”, but no one, I think, would have mistaken him for an Italian on the evidence of his pronunciation. His grammar and syntax were impeccable and his command of idiom complete, but in his mouth Italian had none of that fluidity that the purely mimetic linguist loves to exaggerate. It sounded as one may imagine Latin to have sounded at the height of the Empire.

A young man on his first visit to Italy may, in the absence of a responsible mentor, find himself confused and frustrated by the number and variety of demands that are made on his attention. But, in these circumstances, however over-stimulating and bewildering the experiences of the day might have been, an evening spent with Norman Douglas put everything into proper perspective. Wine, of course, played its right part in the creation of the state of euphoria and heightened understanding

by Victor Cunard

in which one went happily to bed; but next morning there always remained in one's possession certain hard truths, like brightly polished stones, that one might never have found for oneself. Douglas never lectured: experience and accurate knowledge informed everything he said.

Why Norman Douglas chose to live in Florence, the city of Art Historians, collectors and dealers, I never understood and never asked him. It was not that he had no time for works of art; he got immense pleasure from the remains of antiquity and, if his judgment on the works of later periods was more intellectual than artistic, he respected their masterpieces as achievements of the human mind; but he was intolerant of the jargon of the critic and the pretensions of the collector. To hear him say, about some singularly unsuitable object or some equivocal situation, "*pure cinquecento*, my dear", was to realise in what contempt he held the dilettante and to receive a salutary warning against falling into prevalent affectations.

Soon after I met Norman Douglas, Mussolini marched on Rome and the Fascist regime was launched on its fatal course. My attempts to find out what Douglas thought of this ghastly experiment in government were never popular, but seldom wholly unrewarded. Anybody who took such a keen interest in humanity could not dissociate himself entirely from the attempts to regulate its affairs, but he had given up Europe as a bad job, and refused to waste much time and energy on studying details of its progressive deterioration. For all that, he usually succeeded, by an apt historical analogy or a penetrating remark on the Italian character, to throw an unexpected light on the petty problem of the hour. Douglas belonged to no particular school of political thought: he detested all unnecessary interference with individual time and liberty and despised all kinds of "grandmotherly legislation"—the phrase is his—that aim at preventing people from going to Hell, or whatever other destination they prefer, in their own way and in their own good time.

Although he has written with sympathy and understanding of other parts of the world, I do not think that Norman Douglas was

Norman Douglas: 1868-1952

ever completely happy except in the South of Italy—unless it were in the Vorarlberg, where he had spent much of his childhood and where he returned nostalgically from time to time in later life. I never accompanied him on one of his walking tours through Calabria or the Abruzzi, but on his visits to Rome, while I was living there, we made several expeditions into the Campagna or to the Sabine and Alban Hills. On these occasions his discrimination between two places, which appeared to me to have equal claims to admiration, often seemed arbitrary. He was as loyal to a place in which he had been happy as he was to a person whom he had loved, and purely subjective considerations certainly played a part in these judgments; but their basis was always sound. Douglas's knowledge of Southern Italy embraced every element that contributes to the nature of a *genius loci*—from the geological formation to the personal characteristics of the inhabitants—and his estimation of a place's merits were seldom at fault.

I had not seen Douglas for some years when he reached England in 1942. His step had lost some of its sprightliness, but the wit was as incisive as ever and the eye just as bright. "A mixture of Roman Emperor and Roman cab-driver", Reggie Turner once said, when describing Douglas's appearance, and the distinction and shrewdness had not diminished.

He hated London and was unhappy there; the regulations irked him and the black-out bewildered him. Most of his friends were too busy to give him as much of their time as they would have liked to, wine and whisky were the only things that could lighten the gloom and depression and they were hard to come by and prohibitively expensive. Self-pity and discontent were not, however, amongst Douglas's weaknesses and he was not long in making a tolerable life for himself. On his announcing that he was prepared to give lessons in French, German, Italian and English, I suggested, with some misgivings, that he should take a friend of mine, a chaplain in the Free French Forces, as a pupil. I need have had no fear: Pagan and Catholic got on extremely well together and the *abbé*, having learnt to read English

by Victor Cunard

in the pages of *Alice in Wonderland*, left the country with a greatly enhanced admiration for the British genius.

From the end of the Italian campaign until he got permission to return to Italy nearly a year later, Douglas was on tenterhooks of impatience. He wanted to lay his bones somewhere in "Siren Land" and, if the authorities delayed, they would, he feared, deprive him of his last wish. He survived to spend six years on Capri and died there in the early hours of a February morning repeating softly to himself the single word "Love".

Norman Douglas certainly did not fit easily into the time in which he lived, but to find the period where he rightly belonged is difficult. If it be not too fanciful, I would suggest the age of Greek mythology. There was much in him of Cheiron, the wise old centaur who delighted to instruct the young; and like Cheiron, he would have renounced immortality rather than suffer incurable pain.

He had compiled, for the delight of his friends, an "Almanac" of quotations from his works. That for the day on which he died reads:

Why prolong life save to prolong pleasure?

If Norman Douglas has been cheated of that annihilation to which he looked forward after death, I would address to his shade those lines from the Greek Anthology which he once recommended to me as having "the right note of austerity"—

I'll not forget:

And with the dead: if so may be:

Though you drink Lethe: think of me.

2

“*Uncle Norman*”

by Harold Acton

MY memories of Norman Douglas stand in sharper relief than most of the slides in my stereoscope of muddled months and years, more luminous and precise, yet at the same time flushed with a Giorgionesque glow—the glow of generous vintages. How many litres of good wine we consumed together! But his capacity was greater than mine, and his constitution stronger; and I think it was stronger than most people's. His physique, like his intellect, belonged to the eighteenth rather than to the twentieth century. Hogarth would have enjoyed painting his clean-shaven, clear-cut features, the twinkling eyes and ruddy complexion contrasting with the sunlit white of his hair, and the eloquent geniality that beamed from his whole expression. When he took snuff I often thought how well at ease Hume or Gibbon would have felt in his company. Like Hume, he might have said to Charon: “Have a little patience, good Charon, I have been endeavouring to open the eyes of the Public. If I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition.”

He had those qualities of order, lucidity, balance and precision for which the eighteenth century was distinguishable; he also had, on occasion, its bawdy and downright bluntness. No sacchar-

by *Harold Acton*

ine-coated euphemisms for Norman's spades: he abominated prunes and prisms. His tastes were more classical than romantic; to be more accurate, he was romantically classical. Where Praxiteles ended, Brahms began. Scottish commonsense and economy were leavened by Austrian fantasy and lavishness. The scholar and man of the world were galvanised by a gusto so boyish that they were never allowed to settle in a groove. Those to whom his works were unfamiliar would swear that a page of his prose had been written by some brilliant young man, and until the end of his life his literary style, with its effervescent, apparently facile colloquialisms, which reproduced in more polished form the tone of his conversation, was the style of an athletic and vigilant observer. One of his last letters to me was embellished with a neatly sketched owl; and it struck me that his alertness was like that of Minerva's wise bird.

He was puzzled when a reviewer said that *Old Calabria* has a "bookish flavour", for although he had consulted many a musty tome during the process of composition, there is nothing of the stuffy library about the finished result. Though he had a habit of closing his windows at night, by day Norman was essentially a denizen of the open air. And the air of heaven blows through all his writings.

Our first meeting in a Florentine restaurant—Betti's, now extinct, which D. H. Lawrence evoked in *Aaron's Rod*—was arranged by Reggie Turner with certain qualms: one never knew, he said, how Norman was going to behave. Reggie was the host, but Norman supplanted him in the role of Amphitryon, and his pagan personality presided. As soon as we were introduced he whisked me aside, as it were, filled my wine glass to the brim from the swinging flask on the table, offered me a pinch of snuff (a brisk *Salute!* when I sneezed), interrogated and chaffed the waiter about the basic sense behind the sound of the dishes on the florid bill of fare and, waving an invisible wand, transformed what might have been a commonplace midday meal into a rollicking Illyrian feast.

Poor Reggie, a conversationalist in the delicately manicured

“Uncle Norman”

tradition of the eighteen-nineties, could only wink and blink and stammeringly confess that his digestion was not equal to the slices of raw ham varied with other hors-d'œuvre, the langouste and tender spring lamb (or should we broach the *ossobuco*?) and the salad liberally seasoned with garlic, which Norman was so gleefully discussing. “It’s not his digestion he’s afraid of,” muttered Norman, “it’s the bill. What else can we order?” “Wait a minute,” he called to the waiter. “First let me see those langoustes. Yesterday they were the size of shrimps. Invisible, my dear, like— — —’s tom tiddler.” And off he went to investigate, chucking a child under the chin at an adjacent table with bewitching effect. From that moment its goggle eyes were riveted on this old foreign gentleman, whose benign expression, contrasting with his brusque manner, seemed to promise a world of fun. Back again, satisfied with what he had seen of the crustaceans, he ordered me to drink up my wine: “Time to refill!”

Reggie had chosen *cannelloni*, which Norman declared was courting dyspepsia, adding that he was fed up with *pasta*: in fact he thought he’d hop over to France for a change of diet. An omelette of just the right consistency, for instance. But his talk was not all of food. Having established the importance of attending to one’s physical as to one’s mental pabulum—what scorn he poured on the “don’t care what I eat” attitude of some compatriots—he discoursed on books and travel, on Doughty, Hudson and Cunninghame Graham, with whose work I was then little acquainted. He knew, without my telling him, that I was something of a hot-house growth, saturated in the Florentine Renaissance; and he made me suspect that I had taken the wrong turning. The best advice he could proffer was to shake off my trammels and travel while I could, to complete my education and achieve detachment. With relish he described Goa and the Goanese, the baroque architecture and the tropical vegetation, Saint Francis Xavier—“Why not go there and write his biography?”—and last, but not least, the de-leeshus curries, which made his mouth water even now. In few but pointed phrases, he

by Harold Acton

pictured a scene of such curious delight that it has remained with me as a never-never land. There I would find an ebony love and sweet reasonableness and true philosophy. And once on India's coral strand, I should never wish to return. I'd leave the Quattrocento to rot among the tea-cups of the Via Tornabuoni. "Yes, go to Goa, my boy, and I'll try to join you there. We might even go together." Instead, I was going to Oxford. "Ah well, that won't be a bad substitute for the time being. Mind you enjoy yourself thoroughly. Don't let the dons get hold of you. Stick to the undergraduates."

The child who had been chucked under the chin could resist no longer. As if drawn by a magnet, he toddled across to Norman and sat on his knee. A bright conversation ensued in Italian. "*Come te chiami?*" "*Dante.*" "*Magnifico, ma dov'è Beatrice?*" And Norman and the six-year-old were engrossed in each other wholeheartedly till the parents came over to claim him, apologising for the bambino's forwardness. They hoped the gentleman had not been disturbed. "Not at all; we've made great friends, haven't we? We must meet again." Dante was loath to depart and, unabashed, gave Norman a smacking kiss. The parents, who looked like a couple of prosperous shopkeepers, were flattered and amused: they exchanged cards with Norman, and he promised to call on them in the near future. Reggie congratulated the Pied Piper on his latest conquest; our glasses were refilled; we clinked and cheered. The faintly sparkling Chianti went to my head, but I remember the scene as if it were yesterday. Norman produced a long Toscano cigar, cut it in half and offered me a section, as if to print the occasion on my olfactory nerves. "Is there any particular book of mine I can send you?" I told him I loved *They Went*, but did not possess a copy. "You shall have it," he said. "I'm glad you didn't ask for *South Wind*. Everybody else does. I have quite a weakness for *They Went*." And he told me that each of his books had ripened under the warm rays of some temporary attachment: unless he was in love he had little or no impulse to write. Each of his books therefore, was mingled with the happiest associations of a lifetime. The adventurous and

“Uncle Norman”

intimate details of these were to be elaborated in subsequent conversations, and I was to meet several of his pupil-protagonists.

Reggie Turner had had no chance to shoot off his neat little arrows of wit with such a Boreas as Norman at close quarters, but he was not displeased at the success of his luncheon party. Could any meal with Norman fail to be successful? I asked him. Alas, said Reggie, he was not always thus. In the presence of one he disliked for no apparent reason, he would sit in sullen silence; never a word to be got out of him. He had an obstinate prejudice against Florentine society. The other day, after much patient persuasion over a bottle of whisky, he had cajoled Norman into accompanying him to tea (a beverage he despised) with Lady X, who yearned to meet the author of *South Wind*. Reggie had hired a taxi, and all the way to Fiesole Norman had grumbled and wanted to turn back. Ushered into the drawing-room at last, he had barely exchanged a few words with his hostess before he turned on his heel and snapped: “I’m sorry, I must be going. I had clean forgotten a most urgent appointment. Dear Reggie will make amends.” Off like a streak! Later he had found him sitting alone in a café.

That was in 1923. As for me, eventually I went not to Goa but to Peking, where I remained for seven blissful years. I never lost touch with Norman, however, and I owe much to his fruitful suggestions and moral support. At least I have this comfort now that he is gone: I need only open a book of his at random to hear his voice, for with Norman, decidedly, the style is the man.

I saw him last at Capri on September 3, 1951. He had just returned from an excursion to Sant’ Agata. “Never again!” he said prophetically. “Not even the threat of an atom bomb will dislodge me from this island.” And in his best vituperative vein he cursed the blight that had overtaken Siren Land, the encroachments of humanity in the guise of noisy trippers, architectural excrescences, extortionate prices for poor accommodation, worse food, undrinkable wine. No further “illusion of being on some lonely Alpine meadow” was feasible. He would

by *Harold Acton*

have to add a pithy postscript to his *Uplands of Sorrento*: "Gone are the happy days: even on these Siren heights repose is shattered by that delirious massing together of mortals unable to stand alone . . ."

In his study at the Villa Tuoro, where he enjoyed congenial privacy as the guest of Kenneth Macpherson, I recognised several precious relics from his pre-war apartment on Lung'arno delle Grazie: the dagger-hilt of lapis lazuli, the fragment of a porphyry frieze, the marble turtle from Baia, evocative of the civilisation he valued. A sensitive plant sat on the window ledge. It trembled and recoiled at my touch like an outraged virgin, queer company for Norman. His young friend Ettore was cramming empty gin-bottles and other oddments into a battered suitcase; when this was closed he tied a couple of flower-pots together with string, all of which he was carrying back to Naples that afternoon. The flowers were wan and wilting, and I remarked that they were unlikely to survive the journey. It was worth risking, said Norman, for the boy's parents would be delighted with them; they lived in a miserable tenement near the railway station. Laboriously we set off for lunch at La Pica's. Norman hobbled with effort—arteriosclerosis, he said. He had lost his appetite, but Ettore soon kindled it with his Neapolitan vivacity. Snuff was distributed, as of old; gradually his warm chuckle exploded in breezy bursts; his infectious gusto returned. He was almost buoyant by the time we reached the funicular. Ettore pressed upon me a shiny tin cigarette-case, *come ricordo dell'amico di Signor Douglas*—as a souvenir of Mr Douglas's friend. "Don't refuse it," said Norman. "Ettore likes nothing better than giving presents." And he slipped into my pocket the reprint of an article he had written ages ago about the Faraglione lizard, to peruse on the boat. I invited him to visit me on the mainland, but he repeated: "My travelling days are over. I shall not leave Capri again."

As he stood at the top of the funicular, the benevolent old sage became Olympian. The more you saw of him, the more solid the impression. And he seemed to increase in stature. This does

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not usually happen with authors one has admired. The majority shrink and melt, or turn into men of straw.

Many who visit Capri will think of Norman, and these living thoughts; and joyful ejaculations at this or that view with which he became identified, are the kind of honour he would appreciate.

(Florence, November 1952)

3

A Letter about Norman Douglas from Charles Duff

London, 12th January, 1953

MY DEAR NANCY,

For a fortnight I've been stricken by some sort of bronchial trouble which began with that awful 5-day fog in December. What a delightful city this is: a 'smog'—smoke-fog, with plain, bone-penetrating humidity as base, and a flavouring of sulphur dioxide and carbon gas, came over this metropolis, with the spectacular result of more than doubling the death-rate. The deaths from chest and heart troubles rose to *five* times the seasonal number. To me it smelt and tasted like a gas attack, and it just poisoned me. So here I am, nearly three weeks later, a bit better, though still weak and unable to go out of doors or do any work that matters. And now comes your letter of the 9th from delightful Frascati, the mere remembrance of which—vino dei Castelli Romani drunk until 4 o'clock in the morning—revives me to the point at which I may be able to write something about Norman and my limited though intensive acquaintance with him. Anyhow I'll do my best.

A Letter about Norman Douglas

It was, I think, on the very first occasion that I met him (you introduced me) that we three went, after a drink or two, to have dinner in a little Italian restaurant in Soho. I found that from the moment of meeting him we got on together like a house on fire: and afterwards I felt slightly surprised at this; for people had told me he was a bit difficult, and I was expecting to find quite a different personality from the genial, warm-hearted, and not by any means laconic conversationalist I had been told about. It was in the black-out and, when we were trying to get a taxi, several empty ones passed us and ignored our shouts. "God damn them! How we suffer from them!" said Norman, striking the pavement with the end of his stick. He often used that expression and put such passion into it that I was always amused: he applied it to institutions and annoyances great and small: to governments and especially government offices, to churches, every kind of official, everybody in authority and from these down to taximen or waiters or anybody who offended his pride and great sense of the dignity of man.

"God damn them! How we suffer from them!"—a form of protest which I adopted from him and use with increasing frequency as we progress from one stage of bloodiness to the next.

Before we went into the restaurant, we slipped into a pub, and to Norman's joy they had Burton's beer: "This is not bad," he said, "not like the usual horse-piss—watered at that—which they serve us." And when in the restaurant you asked him the meaning of a word in culinary Italian on the menu—*polpettone*, I think—he said, "*Polpettone, polpettone?* Why, *rissoles*, minced mule with flour, fried with onions and a touch of garlic—very nourishing no doubt."

I found there was no ice to be broken and from that night onwards regarded myself as an intimate and old friend of Norman's: an experience so common, I now understand, that there are dozens of people who met him perhaps once, or flittingly, and who regard themselves as "authorities" not only on the mentality of the man but, on the strength of being a collector of

by Charles Duff

his works, an authority on the Norman Douglas canon! (God damn them; how we suffer from them!) This is rather curious, isn't it? I know of no other writer of note in our time to whom this applies, except perhaps T. S. Eliot, who is "Tom" to a multitude of ardents who never even saw him.

And so we became friends: I liked him, and an instinct which never failed me told me that he liked me.

"Why," he said one day, "I've known you since 1928 when I read your *Handbook on Hanging* and wrote about it in my *How about Europe?* Why don't you write more 'Handbooks' like that? We need them damn badly. We need a whole shelf of them and there's not a lot of people who can write that kind of satire. I suppose it wouldn't pay in these times. Ah, this is the age of tin-plate or at best chromium-plate, after the silver-plate of the Victorians, the gold-plate of the eighteenth century and the rich gold of the Elizabethans."

We were talking of writers one day and the name of Cunninghame Graham came up. I said he had written some good things, such as his sketch with the title "A Hegira", and, above all, his book about Morocco: *Mogreb-el-Aksa*. Norman jumped in his seat almost shouting: "I always thought the man rather a hoax. That beard made him! Shave it off and he'd have been like a fox without its brush. Not that I mind *beards*; oh no! Look at Augustus John! Take away his beard, close-crop his hair and Augustus would be as impressive as before. Him I admire not only as a fine man but for his way of thinking about life. Alas! I fear *he's* the last of the Titans. But Cunninghame Graham had just a bit too much Scottish exhibitionism about him for my liking. Yet I'd like to have seen him in a kilt—he didn't wear one very much that I know of. Must have tried himself in one in front of a looking-glass and thought: 'No! No damned kilt for *me*—trousers will have to do.'" Norman laughed out loud at the idea, then stopped suddenly, shook his head and said: "Very wise too! Kilts are not at all safe!"

I knew Norman until he left England in 1946. I asked him once

A Letter about Norman Douglas

whether he would return to Italy and he said: "Yes—if I possibly can. Life is less pushing there, time is not thought of *as cash*." "And how have you found the Italians?" "The Italians are *all right*," he said; "they're as good as anybody." He said the words as if he had given the subject careful consideration. But it was like that with everything: all of his judgments were mature and, if a little odd at times, you generally found that he could support them with a rich variety of argument. He once said to me: "I like *young* people, or, in fact, most people who are not of my own age. To meet people of your own age is all right once in a while, but I find my contemporaries boring. Not so the young: they can always impart something new, or at least fresh. And they benefit too from old people, providing the old people haven't fallen into that trance which seems to afflict so many after the age of about sixty, especially those *retired* people. Retired? From what? Mostly from life itself! I don't, yet, at all events, believe in retirement. If ever I do, I'll know I'll soon be sailing across the Styx! I don't think I've much longer here,"—that was, I think, in 1943—"about four years more." "Four years!" I said, "Why you're good for at least another ten." And I wasn't far out. When he said "About four years more", he spoke without a tremor—as if he were discussing the life of a plant and not his own.

On several occasions he spoke with great respect of the work of W. H. Hudson, to whom he often referred as a "much neglected writer", adding, "But Hudson's work will live. It will be there and he will be remembered long after the most famous names of today have been forgotten." He seldom said much about writers and writing, though I often tried to draw him. A word he used again and again was 'humbug'. I would say: "How does X strike you?" and in reply I'd hear the word 'humbug' spoken, not with indignation but quietly, as if it were final and there was nothing more he wished to say on the subject. His pet aversions were legion, but, of them all, I think that American publishers headed the list. One had merely to mention American publishers and out flowed the vituperation: "Nearly all rascals and black-

by Charles Duff

guards. Why half of them aren't in Sing Sing is a mystery none of us can solve."

Norman was intellectually playful: he loved a bit of fun about anything and preferred the humorously satirical to the serious. Yet there were some subjects about which I never heard him speak other than seriously. One was D. H. Lawrence, whom he described to me as a sexual adolescent who "never recovered from the shock of puberty, never outgrew it, remained a frustrated schoolboy right to the end and persuaded himself—and how many others!—that he was a pioneering genius in a *terra incognita*!" And he added as an afterthought: "But he could write good *descriptions* and his travel books are excellent. I think that in *Etruscan Places* he touched on some very important things which better-equipped scholars completely missed."

Well, Norman is gone from us. But who is there among those who knew him who will ever forget him? I certainly shall not.

Yours,

CHARLES DUFF

4

Douglas on Capri

by Arthur Johnson

MY DEAR NANCY,

I return, with all my thanks, the letters that Norman wrote you during the war. They interested me particularly because they illustrate how far Norman's memories must all have been packed away in separate compartments whose contents were never revealed to any but the quite appropriate people. As you know, I saw most of Norman during his last sojourn on Capri and, although he well knew that I too had been in London throughout the war, he never spoke a word to me of that squalid period any more than of his stay in Lisbon.

For a man of his age, Norman was surprisingly aware of the present, though it was only on the surface, I think, that he lived in it. He seems to me to have drawn his pleasure, latterly, almost entirely from past associations and—so long as that was physically possible to him—he re-visited, on occasion, parts of Southern Italy whose real attraction for him often remained something of a mystery. There were sudden flashes of revelation from time to time, and that was all. He liked, as he says in the *Maurice Magnus* pamphlet, "to taste his friends and not to eat them", holding that "all interrogation, all social curiosity" was "vulgar and to be avoided", and he, very properly, expected his friends to

by Arthur Johnson

observe that same standard of conduct towards himself. One made few enquiries—had one done so one would have had no confidences, and Norman's confidences were always worth while. "The pleasure of memory and reconstruction at a distance", as he puts it somewhere, meant everything for Norman in those days, I believe, but it was a magic circle he created into which others were only wafted for brief moments of surprised vision, a treasure of past enjoyment, jealously guarded and revealed, if ever, in a manner that was strangely impersonal. One of the outstanding things about Norman was that he was never vulgar, never garrulous, never an exhibitionist nor a shower-off in any manner; essentially unpretentious himself, he hated pretentious people.

The quiet, cultured distinction that characterises his writing was also typical of his social relations with others. John Davenport has pointed out how idle it would be for any of us to imagine that he wholly knew Norman Douglas; and it may well be that the views and impressions of his friends will add up to something approaching a true picture.

Others knew as much as I did and more of Norman in those last years on Capri but, for anything it may add to the picture, I am glad to give you a few of the memories I shall always cherish.

I first met him on Capri on the terrace of a café overhanging the little red funicular that toils up and down between the port and the piazza, laden with a heteroclite cargo of tourists from every quarter of Europe and America—a place where holiday couples, from Naples or elsewhere, are unendingly photographed, leaning against the railings with their backs to the sea, by a horde of swiftly-crouching operators or who, with even more wearisome industry, take photographs of one another. There, at first, sat Norman Douglas each morning from 12 to 1, at a table very slightly withdrawn from the flood of excursionists. Often a solitary figure for a moment, you could have painted him in few colours—reddish pinks for the face and hands, white for his mass of gracefully falling hair; the rest of the figure beige browns and gabardine greys with, on occasion, a startlingly youthful necktie, the nondescript hat; and then his attributes all about him; the

Douglas on Capri

pipe in hand, the old tobacco tin, the snuff-box and his stick always beside him. For Norman, this spot was doubtless a point of vantage for indulging those "pleasures of reconstruction at a distance", not only personal but imaginative too—a bay-window looking out onto the past—and his customary seat had been carefully chosen. On his right were the villa-clad rocks of Capri—the higher part of the old town with multicoloured ancient houses on the level of the terrace and, beneath them, in full view from just there, the last traces of that prehistoric megalithic wall built to protect the upper town from invasion, and of which Norman could recall having seen other vestiges years ago on his first visit to the island.

Norman's feeling for Siren Land lay deep in sources that were preponderantly Homeric and I believe that such interests remained constant in him till the end of his life. But the vista one could command from that terrace was also rich in other suggestion. Down below there was No 13, the Bishop's palace—when there still was a Bishop—a dilapidated pile, indiscriminately inhabited, in the midst of a vast vineyard. Often we sat there of an afternoon and drank their wine, Norman chatting volubly with the occupants who were friends of old. Then, as one's gaze turned westward, there was all the Bay of Naples below one and, close in below us, far below, but quite in the foreground, the ruinous Palazzo Inglese with its memories of Hudson Lowe, the French attack on the island and its capitulation. More to one's left still there were the bulwarks of Monte Solaro, the site of Barbarossa's castle and the road up to Anacapri under the sheer precipitous rocks. One could see too, on the heights, the perilous path by which one of our Maltese regiments succeeded in crossing the island after the French invasion. In the distance too, and far beneath us, there was still a trace of the Castello-al-Mare with its memories of Sir William Hamilton, his treasures and his jewels; including the still lovely Emma, to be sure.

A rich vantage point for reconstruction indeed, that poor café table, in moments of detachment, for a mind like Norman's.

by Arthur Johnson

Such things were always with him, and what easier than to conjure up the vast historical sequence that this obscure island he had so profoundly studied presented, despite all those lacunae and *intermittences historiques* which really only made the adventure and all the varied considerations to which it gave rise the more entrancing. Nor did the stream of vulgar, tawdry Neapolitan tourists that swept by him greatly disturb his dreaming. Norman knew how to get a lot of entertainment out of such spectacles as that too.

But I have an abundant treasury of other happy memories; charming luncheons with Norman and his friends on the terrace of the Villa Tuoro, with its wonderful view over the Certosa, followed sometimes by a lazy afternoon in Norman's study among his books, while he rested in the next room. I remember how surprised I was to discover a copy of Valéry Larbaud's *Barnabooth*—a present from Conrad—although, of course, Norman was well versed in French letters and gladly discussed French writers, Gautier and Baudelaire most frequently, but Gide too, the frankness and courage of whose attitude towards abuses in Colonial administration he admired, though there was much else that he merely dismissed as "not sincere". Norman's literary judgments were generally quite laconic and final—these were all matters about which he had made up his mind long ago.

There were picnics too in that fine grove of trees which you see high above you on top of the cliffs as you enter the harbour—trees that Norman had himself planted, one of his enthusiastic efforts in afforestation. There was delightful cold food and *fiaschi* of wine carried up in the blazing heat by Capriots who slumbered in the shade near-by throughout our luncheon. There was Norman, the elderly Dionysus, to be sure, though his figure was never exaggerated, reclining in amiable comfort and all of us, young and old, clustered about him, enjoying his ever genial company and sharing the old Chianti in generous portions. He must already have been 80 by then, but still joined in the long and stiff walk up to the Villa Jovis where, rather than climb about such ruins, he succumbed anew to the charms of

Douglas on Capri

Carmolina-Circe and her wine—all on the edge of the famous precipice with the ruined Pharos nearby. Many more memories too. Those that are most prominent in my mind are of late afternoons in Anacapri. Some ragged urchin would arrive with a note: "Can you come up?", and, of course, for the charm of being with Norman, one always went. It was rare to find him alone, however—like many old people he had a habit of surrounding himself—for greater seclusion perhaps. Often the wine was not to his liking—"Muck, my dear"—but we sat on laughing and talking with that marvellous view of Monte Solaro before us and watched for those blue shadows that appear at sunset.

There were still sallies in the earlier days: on one occasion I found him in Caprile with Emilio, his servant of before the war who, as bad luck would have it, was to be killed in the most banal of air crashes between Naples and Florence shortly afterwards. Emilio's family was there too and some other friends. At one juncture, I remember that Norman began to tell me something about his school life—Uppingham, I suppose. It seemed that he was kneeling in chapel opposite the wife of his house-master and deeply engaged in trying to induce her to yawn. Meanwhile, her husband was reading "some foolish prayer, 'Lead us not into temptation', you know, or some nonsense like that. What a terrible thing to say to God!" Such sallies grew rarer, of course, although he retained all his wit until the end and his persuasions never changed.

Norman, I think, was essentially an anti-mystic, an anti-dogmatic person. The only dogma that he believed in was the necessary superiority of an intelligence free from dogma and systems.

Norman was neither English nor wholly Italianate, though, of course he did have something of the "diavolo incarnato" about him. But it was such a lovable and kindly one as to endear the whole species.

Norman was of the same family as those Scottish travellers of the past, David Urquhart, Mure of Caldwell, Crauford Tait Ramage and the rest, all cronies of his.

by Arthur Johnson

Besides his inestimably precious literary heritage he has left to some of us another which you, dear Nancy, will be the first to recognise, I mean the bond that unites his friends.

ARTHUR JOHNSON

(Anacapri, August 1953)

5

A Day

by Kenneth Macpherson

PERHAPS the way to give a quick impression of him is to take a humdrum day? A summer day, for in summer he came outdoors and was easier to find.

So then, Capri. A summer day. That means a hot, blue morning, the sky cloudless, the rocks as bright as light. The sea twinkles waiting to be scratched by motor-boats, stitched by swimmers, pricked by oars. Soon it will be overrun and the cries of humanity at play will not improve the short-lived quiet. Inshore the submerged rocks seem to be steeped in royal-blue dye. The coming heat has already affected the thermometer but the garden is still cool; indeed, the hibiscus are frosted with dew. Off come yesterday's faded flowers: snip, snip! A peaceful occupation. Everything dreamy. Then: *Crash!* Green shutters fly open. Douglas is risen.

He appears in pyjamas at the open window, his white hair tousled.

"Hello, dearie," he calls cheerfully. Indeed, it is more than cheerfulness. The effect on one is of total basking: catlike. "What are *you* doing? Footling?"

He makes a sign with his hand, half greeting, half dismissive. What does it mean? Probably: Can't be bothered yet.

by Kenneth Macpherson

Did he sleep well?

"Ye-s . . ." he appraises with some reservation. "All-right-ish," he modifies it. "Too bloody hot though!" sets it in its place. Then he adds: "Well, now I'm going to *pee* and then I'm going to brush my *tusks* and then I'm going to have my *coffee*. Can't think of any other social gossip for the moment. Ta ta." He vanishes.

Half an hour later another window frames him.

"What, still at it? Planting some more bottomical Kew-riosity, eh? Now how can you stand that confounded sun? I'm in a perfect muck (of) sweat already."

And again he vanishes. He is not seen until about ten-thirty. This time he is upstairs on the big terrace. A limp cotton hat with a blue ribbon precariously sewn on is set carefully on a glass-topped table with his pipe, his tobacco tin, his spectacles, a book or two, a silk handkerchief and a walking-stick.

He sits down, carefully placing his feet in the sun, and facing as always the island and not the sea. The Villa Tuoro is high above the sea, most of which is to the left of it. In front, at a distance, is the massif of Monte Solaro, and below on the right is the town of Capri where the top of the Cathedral dome balances on its topmost finial the delicate island of Ischia: a romantic view if you train your eye to avoid the Quisisana's gruesome pilasters and columns.

Douglas likes to look down over Capri, not at the sea. Stupid nonsense, all that ridiculous water, he says, but it might be all right if only the blasted wind would leave it alone. But Capri is the town he has chosen, and from the island he will budge no more. "All I want is peace, with or without honour." And Capri is full of memories—clearly not to be disturbed. It is morning. "I *hate* being disturbed first thing in the morning while something of the mystery of night still lingers." That is why it is ten-thirty before the calico hat, the pipe, the tobacco tin, the spectacles, the silk handkerchief, the books and walking-stick are set on the glass-topped table. And it is still not too hot.

I am thinking of any humdrum morning in any of the last three

A Day

summers. There is the *Dottoressa*. Our *Dottoressa* is from Austria, and that in itself automatically rules out any other medico. To her wise, mature advice, and to none other, he listens, and makes a show of obeying orders.

"Ordered me to march up and down. Get up some circulation. Got to bloody-well goose-step, she says. Goose-step, my boy, *what next?* Ever hear of such tommyrot?"

Then, chuckling:

"It's our little game, you see. I pretend to believe *her*; she pretends to believe *me*! Nothing to be done and she knows it as well as I do, and what's more, knows that I know. Arterio-sclerosis, dear boy, now what on earth are you going to do about that? Try a pair of glove-stretchers?" He is much amused by the "little game" and perhaps inclines to half-believe in it?

"Takes me off whisky one week and puts me on red wine. Takes me off red wine and puts me on white. Now it's beer. Hasn't *dared* suggest water. Yet! Longing to, you know; fairly *itching*! If a glass of wine is going to do me harm it's time to put me through the sausage-machine!"

Then the *Dottoressa*, softening on a mild ration of whisky, insisted on two glasses of water with every meal. It is bottled mineral water. He pushes forward his glass, his jaw set in disgust, his eyes twinkling with amusement. It is filled. Down it goes in one, two, three mighty gulps.

"Come on! Fill it up!"

Three more gulps. He smacks down the glass with a bang. We soon stopped using the Venetian ones.

"If the muck's able to check arterio-sclerosis, my pet, it's time to put your trust in God!"

So this is one of the mornings of the goose-step period. Ten minutes of it, carefully timed. Thump! Thump! Thump! No carefully picked member of the Kaiser's bodyguard could have given it more zest. The calico hat is on, the silk handkerchief under it to protect the back of his neck, the brim hanging limply over his nose. The ferrule of his walking-stick goes contrapuntally, tap! tap! tap!

by Kenneth Macpherson

Up and down the terrace. Up and down. Determination, precision and purpose. He wears a shirt with the collar open. There are a few dark stripes because of the "muck of sweat". He wears the rope-soled canvas shoes common to Capri. Timed for exactly ten minutes, at eleven sharp the exercises stop. The ritual has been performed in silence. Does he count the steps? There is anyhow intense concentration. As always when there was purpose. How Douglas could concentrate! There was something impressively high-powered about it, like a perfect motor, intricate and infallible.

Now at eleven he is apt to swear *sotto-voce*. Usually in German. Not only because of the goose-step association, for he often mutters oaths in the tongue of his youth. Then he calls—not in his voice of thunder; that comes later; this is a gentle summons: "Rita!"

Rita is our maid. She appears, knowing what is coming, but day after day faithfully repeats:

"Dica, Signore."

"Ah, Rita, *buon giorno*. Senti: si puo avere un sandwich?"

"Subito."

But it must be small, he insists. At the same time please bring a glass of white wine.

"No earthly use trying to eat before lunch. Simply can't be done. But the *Dottoressa* says a sandwich is good for this infernal giddiness."

He munches his sandwich with an air of displeasure, his thoughts away somewhere. He drinks his glass of wine in a draught, and then he begins to stuff tobacco into his pipe. Now comes the full diapason of his mighty yell:

"Pep-pino!"

Peppino is the boy who is supposed to do such things as gardening, chopping wood, running errands. He sees to it that it is mostly errands.

"Breaking up, my dear, breaking up! Soon I'll need a nurse. Ah, Peppino," he says in his staccato and academic Italian (dialects come later in the day), "do me the favour of looking on

A Day

my desk and seeing if I left my snuff-box. And my reading spectacles. On the desk."

The pipe has been filled; he dives into his pocket. Out comes a coloured cotton handkerchief, a huge bunch of keys on a steel chain (he was a great locker), a bulging, shabby old wallet, a pen-knife, a pencil-stub (sometimes he made notes with the stub on a piece of paper kept for that purpose in the wallet), and a box of matches. The trouble with summer clothes, he says, is that there is nowhere to put anything. He lights the pipe and puffs with an air of accomplishment. It is a lovely morning. One wanders off and leaves him in peace. Just as one is about to disappear he says:

"Kenneth. Listen, my pet. I've got a letter I'd like you to type for me. You wouldn't mind too awfully? Won't take you five minutes. Just six lines. Shall I bring it up at lunch-time?"

"Or if you care to shout when you go downstairs I'll come along and collect it and have it ready."

"Ouf! Don't bother now. Too kind, my dear, you've got a lot to do."

This is very thoughtful, but as he is always thoughtful it must not be taken as belittlement when one points out that this is a way of saying: "Don't bother *me* now". He says he will go down at twelve, just to try—*try*, mind you—to get off a few letters. He always complains that there are too many to write, and that most of them are doomed to retirement with the word "unanswered" scrawled across them.

"I was *determined* to polish off half a dozen." He wags his forefinger from side to side and chuckles. "Not *one*, my dear. Not *one*! How's that for a morning's work? Simply can't be bothered. Too hot altogether. It's this bloody hand, you see. Simply won't work. Pah! To Hell with it and back again!"

His eye falls serenely on the roofs of the semi-distant town shimmering in the early heat. He puffs on his pipe which will have gone out, relights it and throws the match on the ground as if consigning it to a horrible fate.

"By the way," he says, "have you a copy of the *Avifauna*?"

by Kenneth Macpherson

I have. I realise that he is most kindly thinking of something to give me, for I am a collector of his works.

"Now, listen," says he, "you give me back that copy of *Some Limericks*, do you see, and I'll put in that little inscription I spoke to you about. Have you got the book handy? Give it to me *now*. Who knows how much longer this blasted hand will be able to write? Quite numb, you see. Numb." He wriggles it adroitly and one remembers he studied pianoforte under Rubinstein. "Rather like pins and needles. Yes, that's it—pins and needles. But I don't think it's any worse. I don't *think* so. No better, mind you, but no worse."

The inscription in *Some Limericks*, by the way, which is of great interest if not for inclusion here, is beautifully written with a firm hand. The one sign of uncertainty is the ruled pencil lines, later erased but still visible, on which he wrote. This, I think, cannot be considered as uncertainty due to the numbness of which he complained, but as part of that sense of perfect order which his writing (I mean the style of his writing) acquired so long ago. Given a sheet of notepaper he sets down his letter. It is beautifully spaced, the margins are wide and the letters become more and more brief. They now look like those small etchings with unduly wide mounts. They end: Lots of love, or (in early days) Uncle Norman, or Norman or just N. My earlier letters also contain a drawn owl. Very expressive. I wonder when he stopped adding it?

There it is: the letter. Beautifully spaced, but it all runs up to the right. Not too far but it is not straight. That is why I think he used pencil lines when he wanted things to be just so. One is touched, of course, beyond words to have that long inscription straight as straight can be across the fly-leaf; to think that the pins-and-needles hand took all that trouble, while unanswered letters reproached, ruling the lines, writing exactly upon them over the entire page, and then rubbing out the pencil marks. I sometimes think there was no trouble Douglas would not take to please a friend. Grumble he would and volubly but never when the idea was his own. If someone wrote to him to find a cheap

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room with demi-pension, he would cuss and damn to high heaven and threaten to write back: "Too old. Can't be bothered." And he would repeat again that all he wanted now was peace with or without honour. But that afternoon's walk would be to two or three simple *pensioni* where with a technique learned surely in the Souks of North Africa, he would bargain and wrangle with good-nature and acerbity until he was satisfied. One used to say: "Let Tonino do it." Tonino is our majordomo and on his willing shoulders most things fall. "Leave it to Tonino" is the order of the day, and as he is related to half the population of the island and, better still, on good terms with his relatives, he is a good man to handle affairs. "Leave it to Tonino, Norman."

No. Out he would go and do it himself. Yet how often, smarting, he would warn: "Never do favours. People eat you alive and you get the devil's thanks." To his own actions, however, he never applied this principle; perhaps it was the unattainable ideal, for he remained to the last the obedient servant of an incurable kindness.

Twelve o'clock is announced by the Campanile bell, one of the loudest clappers in Southern Italy, and apt to pound 37 strokes at 4.23; I expect somebody knows why, I don't. On the terrace a chair scrapes. Douglas is off to have another whack at those letters. I hurry out. He is collecting his pipe, silk handkerchief, his tobacco tin, his spectacles (wearing one pair now) his books, snuff-box, calico hat and walking-stick.

"Let me come and get that letter to type."

"Oh what a nuisance for you! Are you sure you can spare the time? Five minutes, no more. Just six lines. Quite enough."

Then he says: "This morning I'm going to see if I can get down these steps without using my cane." This is accomplished without difficulty, to his satisfaction. I take the letter to type with two carbon copies.

"Too kind of you." I set down *Some Limericks* in front of him and he smiles approval that one is quick to seize one's advantages. We will not meet again until one. Will it be letters or inscription?

by Kenneth Macpherson

At one aperitif appear on the terrace and his six lines will await him.

At one minute past one he reappears upstairs. It has taken a minute to collect the pipe, tobacco, spectacles (both pairs), the snuff-box, the calico hat, the walking-stick, and replace the silk handkerchief with cigarettes. This time no book but magazines—possibly the *Times Literary Supplement* or *News of the World*. “Nothing in either, I’m sorry to say. Nothing of any interest whatsoever.” This is the usual verdict on both of these weekly records, pronounced with some disgust.

This, being a humdrum day, is free of guests. We settle down to our drinks, Douglas choosing the shadiest corner. It is warm now, everywhere.

“Two letters, my de-aw. Two. Five lines each. Simply can’t be bothered. This drink can’t do me any harm, can it?”

“Impossible.”

“I’m in a perfect muck of sweat. How about you?”

Hot but I like it.

We always discuss the state of his health before passing on to other matters.

“Feeling infernally swimpish, my de-aw. *Infernally* swimpish. Wish I could put it down to drink. I wasn’t at all drunk last night, was I? Of course not. Lemonade is all I had in the Piazza and tea. Tea, dammit. You can’t get drunk on that, I’d like to see you try!”

“Well, I think we had a whisky or two after dinner.”

“Whisky? After dinner? *We* had? Where? Cor blimey, so we did! I was forgetting; that’s right, we had a little concert, dear old Brahms. But I didn’t drink much, did I?”

“No. They were weak too.”

It all comes back to him.

“Why, yes of course. Weak was it? *Hah!* I should shay sho!” He laughs with a big Wah.

“Dear old Brahms in a perfect *bog* of twaddle. Of course.” Cheerful, he helps himself to a pinch of snuff. “No use offering you any, I suppose? ‘Nope! Take the bloody stuff away. I don’t

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want your bloody snuff.'” This is said in the voice of an old parrot.

We are short of water and the municipal hose that fills the hungry cisterns lies across the terrace. I complain that it costs almost as much as wine.

“Water pity,” says Douglas, who likes his puns, “Water you going to do about it?”

Luncheon is served.

What is it today? *Ravioli*. Good. He heaps his plate and takes a second helping, but not before he asks:

“*Che viene dopo?*” What’s next?

“Chicken *alla griglia*”, Tonino may say. Douglas makes clucking sounds like a hen and piles his plate anew. Chicken bores him. If, however, it is tongue or, in season, a stuffed pig’s foot called *zampone*, one serving of *pasta* is sufficient. “Afraid I’m going to punish your tongue, my pet. I’m rather heavy-handed when it comes to tongue.” Cheese he will take if it is the right kind of *provolone*—young and moist. Sometimes when he sees in a shop exactly the piece he likes, he buys it and produces it at mealtime. Fruit? A good pear will do, even a banana. Apples? “Original sin, my de-aw. *God’s!* Trust Him not to do better!” But they cannot, they cannot produce a good nectarine. His favourite fruit. But they cannot, they cannot produce it. He likes to pretend too that tomatoes have no flavour. “If you can find and describe any flavour in a tomato, I’ll eat one. There now!”

Coffee and cognac. No cognac if the *Dottoressa* is at lunch.

“Ha! Dear old *Dottoressa*. Invents a new treatment every week. Like a positive sports’ committee, my de-aw. Doesn’t believe them any more than I do. What’s more, she knows that I know, do you see. Full of invention, I must say. Thinks up more cures than a pharmaceutical encyclopedia. Can’t think where she finds ‘em.”

“But you’re much better than a month ago.”

“You think so? Well, one thing is certain, I’m no worse. That is certain. I might try to toddle up to Peppinella’s this afternoon just to see if I can do it.”

by Kenneth Macpherson

How many times did he say this? Probably a hundred and over a long period. Peppinella's cave, a rustic tavern above the Arco Naturale, was surely his favourite spot on Capri. During summer evenings, Siren Land hard by turns into a glowing myth, and thunderheads as big as continents make a baroque canopy over the land. It all seems conjured-up; it can't be there. Yet there it is, day after day, and in the shadows of her cave, Peppinella serves her wines.

Let us assume that today, although humdrum, has a little break. Friends have invited us for cocktails in the evening. "Do," they say, "make Norman come."

"You'll remember that X has invited us for cocktails this evening."

"I shall wriggle out of that, my de-aw. Will you be back for dinner?"

"Or shall we dine in town?"

"Let's dine in town for a change. Why not? Where? What time?"

We make arrangements.

It is three and he goes down.

But no! I am forgetting the daily *polemica*.

The cigars.

He keeps them, the twisted old black Toscani, in a Florentine leather box: whole cigars, half-cigars, cigars tried and found wanting, stubs and some torn ones, useless except to give to his "poor old man who likes them for his pipe". Every day religiously this box gets forgotten. Every day religiously Douglas starts to rise to his feet.

"Are you leaving us, Norman?"

"I shall be back in a minute."

"Is there something one can get you?"

"Of course not, why should you? Just to punish myself, I'm going to go down and get those ***** cigars. Put them on my desk deliberately to bring with me. I'm turning into an absolute *****. I tell you, it's time I had a nurse."

"Don't get up, I'll certainly get them."

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"No, really, why should you? It's too sweet of you. Breaking up, my pet, breaking up. On my desk. Why *should* you have all this trouble?"

The cigars arrive. From his trousers pocket comes a handkerchief, the shabby, stuffed wallet, a pencil stub, an extra pipe, matches, the huge bunch of keys, and lastly the penknife. With this he slices a cigar in half; lights it; draws. Wham! Back into the box with it! Another half. He draws. Wham! Back into the box. Yet another. This time all is well and he leans back lacing his fingers. Now is the hour of sweet content when a little Beethoven or Chopin fills the bill. And then he "evaporates". He is gone.

This is half a day. The rest of it, being humdrum, is much the same. Genial, untaxed, untaxing. What was there to stop him from going on for ever? He may not have been "much better" but he was no worse. That was certain. The hypochondriac tendency could admit that much; it was a big admission.

Tomorrow will be another hot day. The green shutters will crash open and Douglas, his soft white hair tousled by sleep, will appear at his window, grimace if one is there, and call out: "Hallo, dearie." He will goose-step. He will ask Rita: "*Si puo avere un sandwich?*" "*Come no?*" she will smile. "Feeling infernally swimpish, my de-aw. *Wish* I could think it was drink."

But it was that hurrying nuisance, Time.

Happy, those humdrum days; harmonious, perhaps he would have called them?

KENNETH MACPHERSON

IV

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

IV

A Bibliographical Note on Norman Douglas

by Cecil Woolf

AS a writer Norman Douglas was fertile but not prolific. the variety of subjects on which he wrote—generally with enchanting playfulness—testify to his astonishing versatility.

The bibliography of his writings, covering a period of sixty-five years, is in itself somewhat complicated. Douglas's collected work consists of some five thousand printed pages. His uncollected work comprises a number of contributions to English and German scientific journals, a long list of anonymous reviews of current literature, and a few articles written under "that distasteful régime"—as he later called his assistant-editorship of *The English Review* under Austin Harrison. Some of the scientific writings of his younger days were printed separately as pamphlets and form the early part of the Douglas canon. Now they are sought avidly as rarities by collectors and are worth their weight in gold. A few of the reviews and articles of the *English Review* period were gathered up, years later, in a volume entitled *Experiments* (1925).

A Bibliographical Note on Norman Douglas

Douglas's first book—*Unprofessional Tales* by 'Normyx'—was written in collaboration with his wife Elsa FitzGibbon, she providing the plots and ideas, he giving them form and expression. (There were two exceptions to this—*Nerinda*, of which the central idea is to be found in Lucian, and *Anacreontic*, which, incidentally, is Douglas's only experiment in versification.)

D. H. Lawrence's remark—"Douglas keeps everything" is no less apt because it comes from one who kept nothing. Certainly the wide range of the interests and studies of Douglas's early days were never wasted, and it was in his nature to store up for future use the fruits of his own and other men's experience. No small part of the erudite work which appeared in the Capri monographs was based upon researches made by the famous palaeographer Professor Bevere in the Naples archives—the richest archives in the world. (See *Fabio Giordano's Relation of Capri*, etc.) And much of the materials for *Birds and Beasts of the Greek Anthology* was culled from the Greek Anthology by J. E. Brooks—a brilliant Greek scholar but a very indifferent poet. The central idea of *They Went* is the same as Lalo's *Roi d'Ys* and Peacock's *Misfortunes of Elphin*. But this is not to cast a doubt on Douglas's originality; the transmutation of his material, which was always masterly and complete, leaves the finished work essentially original.

In *Nerinda* and the Capri monographs, the seed was sown from which sprang so much of his later writings dealing with Southern Italy. Careful examination of the text of most of Douglas's work will reveal that he was an inveterate reviser. For the most part these revisions are slight, but sometimes, as in the two versions of *Tiberius* and *Sister Serafina*, in *Capri Materials*, which he rewrote for *Siren Land*, he has completely rehandled his material. In *Late Harvest* (p. 23) he wrote: "After a short interval I am generally dissatisfied with everything I have written and curse my folly for allowing it to go to press."

Several of Douglas's books first appeared serially—at least in part—in periodicals. Many were privately printed in elaborate limited editions before being offered to the public. He did not

by Cecil Woolf

make his appeal to a wide public: he was a collector's author, and during the collecting boom of the twenties and thirties, his readers were willing to pay high prices for his Florentine editions. When these were exhausted he would sell the book to a publisher.

His early work brought him little or nothing in the way of money. Of the seven hundred and fifty copies of *Unprofessional Tales*, published on commission in 1901, five hundred and ninety-four copies were pulped. *Siren Land* only found a publisher after being "hawked about for more than a year"; it was eventually accepted by J. M. Dent in 1911 on the advice of Joseph Conrad and Edward Garnett—then their reader. The first edition brought Douglas £40, and eight hundred and ninety of the fifteen hundred copies were pulped. No publisher would take the risk of that "breathless catalogue" *London Street Games*, and it was published on commission in 1916. *South Wind* (1917) was to bring him fame, but the failure to secure copyright for it in America, where it proved an even greater success than in England, cheated him of the rich financial reward which would otherwise have been his. The record of many of his later books makes equally dismal reading; few were to escape being remaindered, pulped or reduced at some period. For *Late Harvest* and *An Almanac* no American publisher could be found.

It is strange that so few of Douglas's books have been translated. There are German, Portuguese and Danish versions of *South Wind*; a Danish rendering of *In the Beginning*, and French translations of *Alone* and *One Day*. In Spain the censorship forbade the translation of *South Wind*, without stating their reasons. His insularity is untranslatable?

After Douglas's death there arose some controversy over the authorship of Giuseppe Orioli's two books—*Moving Along* and *Adventures of a Bookseller*. Orioli's name is closely connected with the bibliography of Douglas as the publisher of many of his books; but although Douglas must certainly have made suggestions, criticism and corrections, as Mr D. M. Low and Mr Irving Davis pointed out in the *Times Literary Supplement* (July 18 and 25,

A Bibliographical Note on Norman Douglas

1952), there can be no doubt that the somewhat exaggerated claim to participation in the authorship of his friend's books—which, apparently, he occasionally made in his last years—went beyond the facts.

When Douglas died his literary work was completed, and he left no unfinished work behind him. There remained, however, two finished books to be published—*Footnote on Capri* and *Venus in the Kitchen*. Every endeavour to find three unfinished works he mentions in *Looking Back—A Tale of Elba*, *The Unfamiliar Spirit* and *Love among the Ruins*—has failed. It is probable that he “consigned them to perdition” as he suggested he would. He collected material for two other books—*More Limericks* and *Last Limericks*—projected sequels to his *Some Limericks*, but after the annoyance in the Police Court at Florence, stirred up, it is believed, by the squeamishness of the British Home Office, Douglas says he “judged it wiser to publish no more ‘Lyrics’.”

That Douglas was something of a bibliographer himself may be inferred from references throughout his writings to matters bibliographical, especially those relating to his own work. *Late Harvest* and *Looking Back* both contain a wealth of bibliographical material on his own work, and there are his contributions to McDonald's *Bibliography of the Writings of Norman Douglas* (1927). This is unusual for an author, and would suggest that he knew, like Stendhal, that he would have a public a century hence. He also attached much importance to the way in which his books were produced and, although his text sometimes suffered at the hands of his printers the production of most of his works was physically handsome. Unfortunately, some of his later books were brought out in a shoddy manner.

There was nothing little about Douglas, and he stands out from the contemporary scene, as one who in literature as in life relied on his own sense of values in preference to the conventional standards from which smaller men find support.

His books show the gusto with which he sat down to the study of abstruse subjects and his immense zest for life, whether we picture him in his beloved Siren Land, in Tunisia, the Vorarlberg,



N D. at work at Positano

1946

by Cecil Woolf

or among the blue lizards under the Mediterranean sun. And his books are likely to endure for this reason that—read them at whatever period of your life you happen to find them, open them wherever you like, you will be amused and gratified for the durable sunshine which he contrived through them to radiate.

“Your books,” wrote Lytton Strachey, in a letter which Douglas printed in *Looking Back*, “are so full; there is so much of many things in them—so much experience, so much learning, so much art, so much humour, so much philosophy, and so much proof that there is so much, so very much, more underneath that is unexpressed.”

London,

November 1952.

V

HIS BOOKS

V

His Books

With the dates of their first publication

THERE were a good many scientific papers by G. Norman Douglass, as he then wrote his name, in his adolescence and early twenties, and they are now so rare and highly-esteemed that they fetch up to £5 a copy in England and even more in the United States—things like *Contributions to an Avifauna of Baden* (1894), *The Beaver in Norway* (1895), and *On the Darwinian Hypothesis of Sexual Selection* (1895). The longest of these scientific works, *On the Herpetology of the Grand Duchy of Baden*, first published in nine consecutive numbers of *The Zoologist*, was reprinted later in a volume called *Three of Them* (1930). The same high prices are fetched by his several monographs on Capri (1904, 1905, 1906, 1907), all of which were incorporated, in slightly different form, in his great *opus*, *Capri—Materials for a Description of the Island* (1930), of which he said that though hardly anyone would want to read it right through, it would be found extremely useful for reference.

1901: UNPROFESSIONAL TALES by "Normyx", in collaboration with his wife, a very rare item indeed on the market today. Some of the stories here were rewritten and went, years later, into *Experiments* (1925), with a selection of book reviews done by him for the *English Review* as assistant editor. It is dedicated to Ouida.

1911: SIREN LAND is, in this sense, really his first book—and what a beautiful one to have started off with; and, indeed, for the reader to start with. It concerns the Sorrentine peninsula and Capri and contains many easy-flowing, stylistic pages on the character of the landscape—sea and sky, vine, stone and olive are admirably recorded, as are people

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and conversations, legends and history. There is much about the Sirens, and a spirited "debunking" of the Blue Grotto and other cave "magic". Along with his spontaneous gaiety and wit comes proof, everywhere, of the impressive amount of scholarly research that has gone into the book. One example of this is the long tale of Suor Serafina di Dio, a famous masochist nun of the 17th century. And the striking, the wonderful essay on Tiberius reveals his power of reasoning. It is a revaluation of the Emperor, for whom he makes out a very good case indeed, and he is most interesting about him in his thoughts and deductions. He is all for him. Tiberius has been maligned! (Might it be, he wonders, partly because Jesus Christ happened to be crucified during his reign?) Later comes the side-splitting description of fish and fowl in "Rain on the Hills"—of those pestilential little aquatic creatures (some "with bodies like a lead pencil," others "with no bodies at all but heads like Burmese dragons") that go into the *zuppa di pesce*, and of how the Hen is chased and caught "for the *signore's* dinner". Strange indeed that such a brilliant and well-written collection should not have met with instantaneous success. After two separate editions, it was later read more freely in Martin Secker's *New Adelphi Library* series at a cheaper price.

1912: FOUNTAINS IN THE SAND. Thinking now of Douglas on Italy, one might be tempted to imagine that he was already pledged to it alone, because of the intensity of his feeling in *Siren Land*. But the same quality of lucid analysis is trained here onto things Arab—or, more exactly, on to things Arab and French in considerable contrast! This sharp-speaking, brisk, yet frequently poetic kind of travel book should accompany anyone going to Tunisia, which it describes so vividly. (No reason for not reading it anywhere else!) He spent several months there on diverse occasions, the last time of all, in April 1938, with me. Facts and speculations on the long-gone past with its Roman and prehistoric remains (those "Chellean, skull-cleavers", for instance, that he picked up on the Meda Hill near Gafsa), and various encounters with the nomads of the black tents, abound; a few legends have a place as well. There are admirable observations on Arab character and French behaviour; and, best of all, that startling discovery of his: "*Mektoub*" ("it is written", or fatalism) is "the intellectual *burnous* of the Arab". As the *burnous* imprisons gesture by its ridiculous shape and removes all possibility of movement, so has "*Mektoub*" enswathed the Moham-medan mind! There are lovely descriptions of mouldering courtyards

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and stealthy figures there of a night, of desert sunsets and green oasis gardens—and, of course, *not one* of the easy *effets de bazar* that might so easily have gone into the writing of other authors dealing with “the witchery of Orientalism”. Ironical, salty and pungent, *Fountains in the Sand* is full of surprises, and it is also rather a ferocious book. How else could it be, dealing faithfully, as it does, with such a gaunt and harsh country? An inspired account of a battle-to-the-death between Kabyle and Tripolitan miners, the sceptical comments on everything emitted by sundry French Civil Servants and in particular by Monsieur Dufresnoy, the French *ingénieur des mines*, all that he showed Douglas of the Metlaoui Phosphate Mines (“the remains of tiny Eocene fishes that swam and crawled about thousands of years ago”), and the sudden figure of a Polish Count wandering about in unexplained exile are some of the highlights—if highlights one must search for. (He revealed in *Late Harvest*, long after, that he had invented this Pole—a synthesis of a certain kind of philosophy of behaviour!) It is an admirable book and a most informative one, and an officer in the British Army wrote him, in 1943, that it had been of the greatest practical use during operations in Tunisia. I am greatly attached to *Fountains*—to the point of putting it into French at this very moment.

1915: OLD CALABRIA. Like *Siren Lane* it is a collection of essays that embody his thoughts and experiences during his numerous, detailed journeys and wanderings over this rugged and deepest Italian South—a great deal of the time on foot, and at moments, thoroughly stranded. Classical figures are constantly evoked as he traverses the regions of their birth, and local characters abound—those “Albanesi” and “Americani”, Italian workers returned—the latter—from emigration to the United States of America. There is a telling description of Messina just after the earthquake, and, in quite a different vein, the enchanting story of “The Flying Monk” of medieval times, one of his best-known pieces of writing. And then comes another contrast, to my mind one of the most touching conversations of sheer human warmth ever set down, that in “Tillers of the Soil” with a gentle old labourer, still working among the stones and vines when nigh on eighty. Alternatively sparkling and dreamy (very much like himself) and always vivid and descriptive, one finds oneself constantly thinking: “What a versatile writer is here. How beautifully he blends the colours of his individual palette.” At the end come some striking pages on George Gissing, that other impassioned traveller in Calabria.

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1916: LONDON STREET GAMES. Who else but Douglas would have thought of collecting and getting them down on paper, before they disappeared from the everyday life of the children? (Someone, it seems, has done the same for American street-games since then.) Who *can* he have met with knowledge and memory sufficient to tabulate for him all these hundreds of clattering acrobatics improvised and played by the boys and girls of North and East London, with caps and balls and string and pins and bus-tickets—with fantastic names to them such as “Pulling up Father’s Rhubarb”, “John Brown’s Knapsack”, “Dead Men’s Dark Scenery”, “Deliver up them Golden Jools” and “Mother, I’m over the Water”? He *says* those of them who could write described the games in their own fashion on scraps of paper and that no two of this “breathless catalogue” are by the same child! Dozens and dozens are lightly described or indicated (not all of them polite games, you may be sure!) and at the end comes a mighty diatribe against Cricket and its effects on those it “gets hold of”. Not a game for this kind of place at all. Costly! Well, when you’ve got nothing to play with—no bats and balls and so on—you just have to invent, see? And that’s what the youngsters do down this way; they invent. Because they’ve got to play at something unless they want to be soppy fatheads, and none of them could ever be that, no matter how hard they tried, see? A juicy Cockney aroma steams up from it all through. And moreover, is this not part of the history of London and a social document?

1917: The year of publication of his famous SOUTH WIND, right in the middle of World War I—and a great escape it was, too, from the horrors and boredom of daily events. I have read it three times at long intervals, and each time the emphasis of its excellence has seemed to lie in a different place. First, the theme or plot—admirable. Then the beautiful writing. But it is pointless to attempt to tell of its merits in any “sequence of importance”; they are all so close and well-knit, so interpenetrated one by the other that you cannot separate the style from the wit, the conversational values from the descriptive ones. Some critics complained that there was “no plot”. And Douglas (in *Alone*) flared up: “No plot? Nonsense! The plot is how to make murder palatable to a Bishop.” And, by Jove, how well he did succeed with his complicated “plot” and rich, unexpected, unpredictable circumstances, all along. The characterisation of Bishop Heard and Mr Keith (who, in his wit and wisdom, may be thought of as Douglas himself) is, of course, perfect; but so is that of all the other characters on this

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fabulous island that Capri has taken to be itself—and not so mistakenly either. That spate about the old Russian mystic monk and his Little White Cows . . . Those acid revelations concerning the Italian lawyer's career . . . The discussions about what Life means (!) back of the troubles of two young men, widely different, who are as common as blackberries in England . . . The roars issuing from the unsavoury drinking-club, and dear Miss Wilberforce throwing off her clothes periodically under the light of the moon . . . Indications and implications, shrewd remarks and scintillating epigrams . . . Sound and wholesome philosophy, as well as the unforgettable colours that arise while the reader goes with him around the island in a little boat, to the accompaniment of a scornful Caprese oarsman pointing out suicide-rocks and the like . . . How rich it all is; how beautifully *made*. I cannot think of it as being outdated, *ever*. (Although, no doubt, many of the novels that were written by others "in the manner of" are so already.) It will become a fine old period piece—as much so as those of dear Dickens and—I hazard—will weather time and change in the same fashion, because of its magnificent quality and excellence: sterling, all through.

1920: *THEY WENT*. His second novel. It is a fantasy shot through with swirling, highly-coloured figures on some fabulous Atlantean promontory of the imagination, (for which he went to the West coast of Brittany in 1917). A doddering King, a dreaming Queen, an ardent Princess, a powerful, mysterious Greek—Theophilus—girt with the arts and cunning. There is also the great Stranger who comes again many years later from over the sea, accomplishing, with the aid of the tide, the downfall of that proud and beautiful city that encouraged the arts and never asked questions of any foreigner who might arrive at its gates. Theophilus and the Princess are lovers of intelligence and of the, not always painless, pursuit and discoveries of beauty. The King has his bottle and the Queen has had her dream—that encounter long ago with the mysterious stranger, secret father of the green-eyed, flame-haired Princess. The Druidess Manthis and the early Christian missionary from Ireland, Kenwyn, are other vivid personages in the Ballet it all makes. Why, indeed, is not a Ballet evolved from this rich, barbaric Byzantine-like creation embellished with the usual Douglassian wit and surprises? "'A rainbowish sort of place' the old King often remarked." Indeed, it must have been. And a rainbow remains of it—as radiant, as tenuous.

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1921: *ALONE*. This is the book that he thought, himself, was his best, and it contains some magnificent writing on Italy. The preface is a gem of pure, unadulterated laughter, one of the four or five wittiest things he has written, and it describes his efforts in 1916 in London to find some suitable kind of National War Work *pro bonum publicum*. Had he "tried the War Office?" was what they all turned him off with. *He had*. Finally he left England and tells, unforgettably, of the various stages of his journey (and of subsequent times in Italy) from Mentone into the highly suspicious, touchy country, evoking a lot of the people he met, or had to meet (quite a number of them were in the Police although he was never caught, climbing mountains and doing other obviously suspicious things, "with the merest astrolabe".) There are wayside ruminations about Shelley and Ouida—beautiful pages of thought and criticism here—and lines about the ever-changing colours of the Arno, and how Rome was built "in a belt of fire", and how the nightingales roar at Olevano; and there is a good deal that is of great interest on malaria and its effects on the population, and on how many other local matters—all, as it were, taken up and examined like so many wonderful, strange objects and then set down again and commented on magnificently. Among his musings are some on Gautier and Baudelaire (he has some rather odd things to say about their poetry) and on Brahms—beautiful. All of this book is the very core of Douglas and it is, perhaps, the most mature of all—if by "mature" I may suggest a whole August of fruitfulness and harvested plenty. And, on top of all, it seems a valuable guide to that most peculiar of matters: the *psychology* of Italians—so good and true are all his observations and reflexions about them here: how to *be* with them, for one!

1923: *TOGETHER*. This, like *Alone*, is largely autobiographical and concerns his long, leisurely journey to the Tyrol in 1919–1920 with "Mr R", that young Corsican student of Mentone (René) who miraculously appeared in the station there, snatched up his heavy bags and bore him along to his home and parents in what must have been one of the most despairing hours of Douglas's life—as is recounted in *Alone*. Great mutual benefits came to both teacher and pupil when Douglas and René went off to the Tyrol where "Mr R's" difficulties with "vocables" and innumerable other English complexities make some of the gayest pages of this thoroughly happy book. Positively hilarious sequences they are, as is all that Douglas set down of his pupil's lively and delightfully obstinate young mind. And what an

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informative book it is on the score of the country. The Index here, as in several other works of his, is a work of art. Things like: "Anna, the old nurse; her passion for idiots and corpses, and wolf stories . . . Bats as pets . . . The uses of double-beds . . . Butterflies frozen on snow-field . . . Cows "explode" from over-eating . . . Falling in love with a mountain . . . Hunting for garnets . . . Indifferent specimens of idiots; types of the old school . . . Ovid blunders in botany . . . Skittles played with skulls . . . Theocritus seldom caught napping . . . Town-bred persons, often incomplete . . . Dining off verdigris", and how many more expectable or unpredictable subjects that arise for his inspection. There is a long account of his father's wonderful mountain climbing feats and fatal accident, and a wonderful description of that old maternal grandfather "always spick and span", as we read already in the index, where he, progressively, "excavates in imagination the Acropolis of Athens; tells Prince Consort how to handle Queen Victoria; is sometimes mistaken for an angel; dominates his harem, (and is) vicious to the last". What characters they all were in this large Douglas family of the 1860s and 1870s, but fiercest of all was that same maternal grandfather who used to infuriate the young Douglas by calling him a beetle-collector whereas he: "at seventeen, my lad, I was already commanding a fortress in Hungary. And here you are catching cockroaches." The evocation of "Mr R", right through the book, with his "fly-horses" and never properly-mastered "vocables" is one of the happiest things in his writings, perhaps, indeed, because this was one of the happiest times in his life, and such things—one may be grateful—come out in writing. An admirable book; it is a mine, too, of many kinds of information—historical, botanical, geological and human—all wonderfully woven together and most revealing of the author's rich personality, and of his way of dealing with all sorts of circumstances and people—and "Mr R".

1924: D. H. LAWRENCE AND MAURICE MAGNUS: *A Plea for Better Manners*. This incandescent, short book is Douglas rampant, at his best in two main keys—as ever, he is superb when it is a case of human values, reinforced here with attack, and again when it is a case of critical acumen. The subject warrants the vigour of the spate. These sixty pages or so were written in defence of a dead friend vilified by D. H. Lawrence who had also known him, Maurice Magnus, rather well. Magnus was a young, hard-working American author and journalist of considerable brilliance, a generous man of taste, driven, mainly by financial worries, to commit suicide in Malta in 1920. There is a lively

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description of his personality by Douglas to begin with. To those who may say "All this was so long ago!" it should be pointed out that "the Magnus pamphlet", as it was sometimes referred to, was a red-hot polemical coal for a long time in the twenties. It is no cinder now—nor ever will be to anyone interested in literary and human integrity as well as literary energy, and also in the utterly opposite characters of Douglas and D. H. Lawrence. This is half the theme. The other half deals with better manners in writing and with the ethics of authors, or rather, lack of them among such novelists as make literary capital out of caricaturing friends and acquaintances in print—Lawrence, for one: "the novelist's touch". These pages might have been written elsewhere (they would make a wonderful article) but are most apposite here. And, one thing leading to another, "the novelist's touch" leads Douglas to thoughts on Conrad, who, despite the fact that he never gazed into the dark places of the souls of others (and was thus without psychological awareness) was yet a great writer, because his stories were swept along by the force of their own current: the circumstances of the tale. Things like this and many other pages of literary criticism are of enduring interest, although the whole tangle around the death of Magnus is such that it will probably remain a puzzle for ever. And how did Lawrence, instead of Douglas, whom Magnus wanted as literary executor, come to be the one who got Magnus's *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion* posthumously published, after denigrating, travestying, libelling and ridiculing him at great length in his introduction to this very book? An odd enough occurrence in any case, the prefacing of a work by someone you proceed to inundate with gall . . . It was to be called *Dregs*; the title was changed and the printed version (perhaps "necessarily") expurgated. Why did Lawrence set out to have it published? He makes Magnus a cad, a bore and a scrounger, without much talent, etc. That is quite clear. But what will strike anyone who reads these interesting, anguishing *Memoirs* (long since out of print, but procurable) is that Lawrence's Introduction-picture of him simply *does not tally at all* with Magnus's own, warm ego as it emerges more and more sympathetically from his description of the brutal *Foreign Legion* in 1917. Magnus wanted Douglas to have all his papers; Douglas had even helped him with his book. Yet it was Lawrence who handled the whole affair with a publisher. To whom did the royalties go? To Lawrence. The Maltese to whom Magnus owed the sum of £55 thought so well of him that he had his body transferred from the cemetery to his own

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burial-ground. Lawrence it was who shed over the dead man's memory the spite and spleen that certain types of creditor might feel. Douglas's exposition of the facts and his defence of Magnus are very strong, and ably done. And, logically enough, there follow the remarks about "the novelist's touch", with its caricatural distortions and vulgarities that such authors think must be necessary to *produce good sales*—something, in short, very like America's yellow press or that of any other country unhappy enough to possess such a disgusting organisation! This little book is of a kin with Douglas's *How about Europe?*, and the incontrovertible reasoning, wit, and sharp, heady writing, make it of permanent delight. He published it himself in Florence, and soon there were three printings, the third stereotyped, of the unassuming little volume in paper covers (price 5/-, to be had of the author) that sold like fiery little cakes. A collector's piece in any of these issues—and one of the best sequences in all of his writing, product of cool head *cum* hot and feeling heart.

1925: EXPERIMENTS. "To Bryher, who with infinite patience has exhumed and endeavoured to revivify these mouldering remains" says the dedication. "Anything but mould here!" one is soon exclaiming, dipping perhaps first into the study called "A Mad Englishman" (that delicious, eccentric traveller Charles Waterton), or reading with appropriate ill-ease the strange story called "Queer", or turning to his slashing reviews (*English Review* period), his objections to Elinor Glyn, Marie Corelli, and how many other novelists male and female who, in later years, he might just have ticked off with the word "Muck!". Painstaking reviews they are, though. The essay on Poe is a beautiful piece of writing, analytical not only of him as an author but as a human figure. Douglas-the-critic arises here, so sound and well-tempered that the words "Even had he written nothing else, what an important prose-writer he is" come into one's mind. A magnificent critic! But not of poetry. That must be obliterated in connection with him. Yet, curiously enough, there is a poem here *by* him, one—the only one known to exist: "Anacreontic—Cowley-Fashion" is a neat little number, beautifully turned, to a Wagtail; it ticks on like a metronome with no loose lines or quavering vagueness to its sympathetic conclusion:

"Who's for water? Wagtail, you?
Give me wine! I'll drink for two."

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Would he have been a good ironic poet had the current of writing come to him also in that form? *Experiments* is important in an all-round way, and is proof of his versatility. It is supreme on one subject—on things Arab. These are in the two long, superbly constructed and admirably written studies, first published in *The London Mercury* and *The English Review*, on Doughty's *Arabia Deserta* and (on Isabelle Eberhardt and Marie Bashkirtseff) *Intellectual Nomadism*. (I typed them out once, to have with me on a journey, and at the end of this thought them even finer than before). Of all his critical writings they are the most valuable. It is here one observes best the sheer and impeccable lines of the architecture of his mind. This is where—apart from all sorts of extraordinarily interesting remarks and thoughts about Doughty, the Desert, and Isabelle's travels in North Africa, and why her affinity with the Arabs was a natural thing to her Russian, nomadic soul—this is where the principles of "thinking straight" and "writing straight" are once and for all laid down. What author can do more? My own reaction is that none I have read in any language has done anything of this kind half so well.

1927: BIRDS AND BEASTS OF THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY. It is a noble and serene assembly, a selection of the poems and epigrams where wild animals are mentioned by the poets of the Anthology, and not by any means a book for scholars and students alone; the pleasure that arises while one is reading it is like the bliss produced by one perfect summer day: it is Greece in the chirr of cicadas, in a blue swathe of mid-afternoon. The sea and its fishes and dolphins, strange adventures with wolves and lions, with bulls and hedgehogs, episodes relating to bees ("cantankerous and fussy insects"), to geese and starlings—a poem on the death of an ant (who, nowadays, he asks, would accept such a theme without a smile?) . . . He gives us enchanting thoughts about how much else of the fauna of those centuries. Here are the depredations of book-worms, and "the turreting of elephants for warlike purposes", and Shelley's beautiful translation of one of the poems. Will this adorable volume ever be printed again? His introduction, so scholarly and individual says: "Books have been written on the Natural History of the Bible, on that of Shakespeare, of Homer, Virgil and so forth, why not a similar one on the Fauna of the Anthology . . . How birds and beasts affect these men . . . It is as if we were glancing from a window upon some unfamiliar landscape."

1927: IN THE BEGINNING, his third novel, is fanciful, whimsical

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and light in tone, beautifully easy reading, gay, witty and shimmering. A reprint came out in 1953, with illustrations. The story deals with the beginning of the world and the Great Father's first attempt with that peculiar creation of his, Man. In this pagan, mythological panorama, gods and demi-gods fill the skies, the centuries pass imperceptibly; the landscapes (ravishing descriptions) are a blend of Italy, India—China maybe. Back of the vagaries of gods and men emerges that charming pair of old Satyrs, wise demi-gods and detached witnesses: "Drink to the confusion of both gods and mortals" says Nea-Huni to Adzubal—"Really I don't know which of the two is more contemptible." Such is the keynote. Graceful, indeed, are some of the deities, others wonderfully uncouth; strange demi-gods stray through fantastic avatars, the whole tale wandering through time and landscape, its colours those of the elements, of rushes and willows, and, next, of the horrifying desert, domain of the Haunter of Solitudes who is man's jealous, watchful and destructive enemy. There is less here of Douglas's usual philosophy until half-way through. As in *They Went*, an obvious conflict is now afoot between goodness-duty and happiness-beauty. Alas! The pristine state of amorality comes to an end in a sudden clash with something that sounds remarkably like the Early Christians. A conscience-smitten sect arises, with an unaccountable sense of Good and Evil. The horrible change is ushered in by a sort of 9-day-'flu, after which those smitten are seen to have become utterly different. "Goodness, that fell disease" has been born. Ever a-drowse, the Great Father is almost impossible to prick into action; no sides will he take in the picaresques that set the celestial dwellers by the ears, and still less interest in man. Exceptional among the gods is Aroudi, Haunter of Outskirts, a wise, virile and violent individualist who shows "his fiendish pleasure in the visitation. For already men's minds were diverted from things of the earth. The rotted ones found no time to till or sow the soil. They must first puzzle out what is good; they must wrangle about evil and why it is evil and not good." During their polemics the land turns to waste, for Aroudi has "charmed it all into the desert, the dear desert of long ago." Religion rages like a war, the once proud, happy Queen catches the disease, and soon all is austerity within the halls. It is the two wise Satyrs, solitaries in enforced exile, who view all this, discussing gods and mortals together: "The gods . . . Not to be taken seriously . . . And the Great Father himself, with his recent and most abominable trick for muddling the

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brains of the human kind . . ." The trick? That of groping after Good and Evil, result of the 9-day-'flu. Lightly, lightly, no matter how lightly and gaily written, one of the fairest truths in existence is the real under-theme here: that put forward by the Satyrs reviewing the mortals: "If they had the wit to see through their witless gods, they would know better than to tear the spirit away from that body which should be its guide and friend." And "Nothing can be a bane to the one unless it harms the other, at the same time."

1928: REPORT ON THE PUMICE STONE INDUSTRY OF THE LIPARI ISLANDS. As presented to both Houses of Parliament. (Reprinted by me at my HOURS PRESS for Douglas—80 copies only—from the original Report written by him in 1895 for the Foreign Office.) An official document has to be done in a "basic news" manner and must contain nothing but the essentials. This little piece of work is well-informed and, if one be ignorant of everything concerning the nature of this curious stone, read the Report and you have learned quite a lot. Pumice is found on most of the shores of the Tyrrhenean; is used (among other things) for polishing wood and leather; looks in certain forms like immense, solid rocks, and is extremely light. It comes into being as "A trachytic lava, rendered light and scoriaceous by the escape of gases, and every gradation can be traced from this condition to the heavy, vitreous matter of similar composition, known as obsidian." Lipari Island itself is the main source. When Douglas went there to investigate workings and conditions, he found that the workers, tunnelling frantically like moles inside the mountain till the whole place must have been practically honeycombed with galleries, were fairly well remunerated, but that child labour was fiercely exploited. This was put a stop to entirely, thanks to this Report! ("The only meritorious action in my whole life", Douglas would remark.) *Two* lines in this sober official paper on the unhappy use of children as workers was sufficient!

1928: SOME LIMERICKS. They were privately printed by Douglas in Florence for subscribers—only 150 copies—in stout, handsome, amber-coloured canvas binding, and went off as expected, like wildfire, at five and even ten guineas a-piece, signed copies all. Unique, of course. What *is* to be said about them? They have to be seen to be believed, rollicking, scatological and dire, as they are, in their school-boy mirth, stockbroker or Army-wit, and all of them frightfully funny. But not so funny as the learned note that accompanies each (and its

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variants), where the author (or collator) examines them closely, often in a pseudo-scientific manner. Author or collator? The beautiful, long Introduction (one of his best pieces of prose) speaks of "The Unknown Poet". To him is this delirium dedicated (after speculations as to whether it should not, by rights, be dedicated to Queen Victoria, under whose glorious reign the best, or "golden period" pieces came into being)! Many-authored, are they? Not *one* person has come forward, he says, to claim authorship! The Index is a gem in itself. Things like "Baroda, architectural activities in"; "Manchester, waggishness of mill-hands near". Nantucket, Pitlochry, Samoa—extraordinary occurrences all over the world—Ealing. No one will ever forget the acrobatic feat that happened there! But, remarks Douglas, "Limericks are English to the core. Of how many things can that be said?" They are a bond of Empire, possessing "that harmonious, homely ring which warms our hearts when we hear them repeated round the camp fires . . . It is limericks that keep the flag flying." Moreover, they would never have been "but for Luther's preaching and the victories of Naseby and Dunbar." They "are a protest against Protestantism". They do not exist abroad: "no doubt malnutrition plays a part, and Southern races are apt to be underfed. Limericks are jovial things. An empty stomach is hostile to every form of joviality." What a prey for the pirate this volume has been . . . The bibliography of it "is as tangled as an old sewing-basket", says his bibliographer Cecil Woolf. Even *he* cannot say for certain just thanks to whom, and when and where *all* the pirated editions came out. Five editions, six? Printed in France, in the United States, in ? . And the chronology of these stolen "Gentlemen's Comforts", as they may be called, was an inextricable confusion to Douglas himself. In anonymous dress "The Unknown Poet" goes soaring on, maybe, to this very day.

1929: *NERINDA*. This long story (dedicated to me in this edition) was first printed in *Unprofessional Tales*, and, despite whatever re-writings have occurred, shows how wonderfully mature a thinker, and writer, he was already before 1901. It is a diary kept by a sensitive, sympathetic and very intelligent young man going slowly, inescapably mad, alone with his sister on Capri and at Sorrento. The terrible loneliness within—where shall one find *l'âme sœur* in life?—is described with such pathos that the reader is beset by horror, and fear, and then pity. It makes one terribly uneasy, this "disintegration of a personality", written by Douglas to conjure, as it were, the memory of a

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friend who became insane and died. When finished, it led him to wonder if his development of the case conformed to the kind of madness depicted, and this led him to the great Sir Harry Maudsley who, after careful reading, said that he had handled to perfection "the symptoms of paramorphic insanity". The young man has had a nervous breakdown; Italian climes will cure him; he may not read; he is bitterly lonely; the diary is his confidant. And one day he sees in the Museum at Pompei the lifelike cast "of a young woman, with eyes half-closed as though in pain . . . Chained up in that narrow case, who can she have been? Perhaps the daughter of some patrician, hurrying away to escape the awful vengeance of her gods"—a victim of Vesuvius. He thinks of her more and more; soon he is in love with her. She comes to him in visions; she is from the sea and her name is Nerinda. Finally a tryst is granted him and he knows he must go to her. She alone is for him. But the guardian will not open the case. The diary breaks off. Later, after the crime—the murder of the guardian and the smashing of the case, and of the cast of Nerinda as well—the young man is found floating dead in the harbour of Castellamare. Such is *Nerinda*, a story as moving as can be, with its haunting line, "the disintegration of a personality".

And what of these, two of its many striking thoughts:

"Where are the cathedrals, the penances, the crusades of earlier days? We laugh at the infatuation of our ancestors. Our cult is a discarded husk, a gilded chrysalis lying on the wet ground, out of which Faith, the splendour-winged insect has crept to seek a sunnier abode." And "Indifference, lack of faith, lack of enthusiasm—these be the real mortal sins, these be the outward signs of a moral fatigue of the race, these be the cankers that undermine the body social and politic. A strong man should be capable of strong emotions."

Will anyone deny how closely this applies to today—or dare say they are the thoughts of a person insane?

1929: *ONE DAY*. This little work was offered me by Douglas without any indication as to its nature, and reading the typescript through at one long session it seemed that nothing more perfect could have come to my Hours Press than this recollected vision of Greece. Full and condensed, pungent and happy is this sort of rich essay, this *one* day overlooking Athens, remembering several other times there, from that first one of all, at the urgent behest of his Guardian Angel who bade him leave things just where they stood at that moment with Cora,

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in England! There are enchanting snatches of talk with Greek children ("quite clever enough without going to school at all"), vignettes or sequences about Byzantine churches and artificial grottoes (most convenient for removal—22 or more of them are now in the United States), and Sophocles, who was born here, and the *pentelizein* or five-stones game of old played *still* by the children amid the rocks and dust. The trees are gone, mostly, and it is hot summer, "all dust and glare", and yet it has its own charm . . . As for the wine, that yellow *rezzinato*: treat it like English beer, gulp it down! The third glass—it is getting on for sunset—evokes some fine thoughts on his travelling companion, *The Poets of the Greek Anthology*: "It discloses Greece from every point of view—art, philosophy, history, criticism, social life . . . Greek art has the peculiarity that it spoke both rightly and firstly. We read these lines and realize that nothing in our hearts has changed." Blessed be the hour of sunset! He has climbed and climbed . . . More wine, and more thoughts on these ancients: "So sensitive were they to delicate shades of feeling that these pages might well be regarded as a textbook of good manners." Epigrams—(in the light of his one and only admiration for poetry, how interesting this is) "They were actually hacked with an iron implement into the marble of a tomb". (The only poetry Douglas admired was that of the utmost conciseness, that of "the inevitable ring".) And so, after thoughts such as "the diffuseness" in Pater and "our Gothic distrust of clean thinking", night has come. Sitting on above Athens in the moonlight, now in front of good food and more wine, epigrams of his own begin to assemble. What about this well-known one on the Albert Memorial? "A venerated Queen of Northern Isles reared to the memory of her loving Consort a monument whereat the nations stand aghast. Is this the reward of conjugal virtue? Ye husbands, be unfaithful . . ." Another, in the Metrodorus manner: "A ship of stout oaken timber, ploughing the broad ocean and laden with corn, arrives from Alexandria after twelve days' journey. Say, Stranger, how old is the captain?" Other witty and several beautiful epigrams ("Why always 'not yet'? Do flowers in spring say 'not yet'?"') and the Day is enfolded in night; and, as you close the book, there may be a fragrance of thyme around you.

1929: HOW ABOUT EUROPE? "Brilliant, controversial polemics" someone has said of this tight-packed, incandescent book which is, in some sort, a reply to Kathleen Mayo's *Mother India*. Whether or no,

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nothing could be more lucid, trenchant and categorical, witty and strictly fair with all it handles—an array of social questions that are of vital human interest. If you want to learn about certain aspects of “the twenties”, come here for some striking reminiscings on national (and other) themes, well rounded off with criticisms of an individual kind! A lot of them are, alas, horribly up to date—the situation is far worse now than when Douglas trained his beam on to things like D.O.R.A., Divorce, and ridiculous By-Laws (one of them concerns dog-kennels)—’tis but a natural progression! And yes, I do think it is my favourite among all his books. Such a perfect shooting of barbs at inanities, such *no* under-statement and *no* over-statement but *exact* statement draws my very greatest admiration. And there is so much wit in it all. It is a thinker’s book, too—so many are the truths and discoveries here. If his conclusions cannot please everyone, the postulating of all the subjects is always striking and done with the greatest vigour! What might some of them be? Things like: Public education and its mis-effects—thanks to *the system*. Nationalism, civic affairs (all of this ridiculous “over-legislation”); the role of women; some fine pages on prisons, and on child reformatories in France, commenting on Louis Roubaud’s admirable *Enfants de Caïn* which attacked the infamous *maisons de correction*; comparisons between English and French ways, the concierge system (!); superstitions, monotheism, polytheism, Christianity; the pest of passports and customs; the ‘Come to Britain’ tourist movement (those who do can be certain of the result: catering-hours, drink-laws, British Sundays, bad food, dispiriting hotels, etc.!) There are some very interesting allusions to India (including some of his own observations there) and the way race-prejudice has *evolved since the 18th century*, and William Hickey’s then contemporary memoirs are most illuminatingly drawn on. Where, on the whole, lies the dominant accent in it all? On education, I think, and its effects: loss of individual capacity for thinking! Many other subjects enter this tournament of swirling spears. What a terrific stimulant it is at first reading; one is so excited one omits to realise how well it is written and composed; that comes the second time, or dipping anew! Let me quote as much as I can from various sections: “If I were asked what Europe needs at this moment I should say it is men who can evolve notions independently of other folk, men who can think without thinking what they are expected to think, men who tend to diverge from the common rut and are able to contemplate with fresh eyes what is going on around

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them. Such men might see what is amiss, and might discern remedies. They would be superior men, and somebody has said that all government is a conspiracy against the superior man." Thoughts on Nietzsche, in quite another part of the book, connect directly with this: "Obscurantism, anaemia of thought, are more prevalent than in Nietzsche's day and our standardisation of low intellectual values proceeds so relentlessly that a European possessing but a fraction of his courage and originality will hereafter be classified not as a contributor to enlightenment but as a freak, a throw-back." Certain aspects of the Law: "Our sense of private dignity can survive the most oppressive man-despot; the despotism of the law corrodes it." In three years in England 5,000 new Statutory Rules and Orders were issued! Why? He thinks they may have been "necessary" *to prop up or modify previous ones*: "A vast system of buttresses, buttressing each other into infinity . . ." (Why does this suggest to me some curious abstract or cubic painting entitled "The Laws"?) "Mother India has had a fair dose of such extravagances"—25,000 new laws in the first decade of this century—"in order to govern men who for untold ages have governed themselves without any written legislation whatever, save of the religious kind." "Critics of Hindu illiteracy should not forget that British rule is largely responsible for it. For there used to be 'schools' in every Indian village. In sweeping away the village system we have simultaneously swept away the schools." John Bright complained of this in 1853. Hickey found "no disparagement of native life or customs" in India, and older travellers "are altogether lacking in our tone of arrogance towards orientals. When did our racial superiority over them begin to dawn on us? When our racial intelligence began to decline." What do *Indians* think of this book? It would be good to hear—say—the Indian writer and anthropologist, Cedric Dover, on it lengthily. (This is an invitation, for he would certainly express himself sincerely and interestingly! Incidentally, Douglas and I were given a wonderful dinner by him in his London home in 1943). Religion—"the tenacity of nonsense" can be illustrated thus: "The first French trial of an accused animal occurred in 1283, the last in 1845 . . . A cock was condemned to be burnt at Basle in 1474 for the peccadillo of laying an egg. Mosaic Law, the Will of the Bible, was invoked in justification of such proceedings." Illiteracy—people argue—"should be suppressed because there is some connection between it and criminality. Greater nonsense was never talked. No criminal worth his salt can afford to be uneducated.

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Illiteracy is the privilege of the Chosen Few, even as learning should be . . . Illiteracy makes a man observant. I have to meet an alphabet who could be called a fool. Nor have I ever met a dishonest one; cheatings are risky, if you can neither read nor write." This kind of thing goes on so grandly in the same strain that one is tempted to think he is advocating "illiteracy for all"—or having his fun with us! It is rather like a sort of "salt-lick", this part. But oh what a contradiction is here! Why did *he* take such pains in educating a number of boys himself? What he means, of course, is that the general educational system is all wrong—Uppingham and all that, Universities. Standardisations prevent individual working-out of things, emasculate initiative. And of course this (if we but add the whole of today's money-complex to it) is the real *cri du cœur* of our decade: "A man's passport or *carte d'identité* is beginning to be of greater consequence than his person, and for a good reason. It makes him authentic. If Mr Jones, the European, cannot produce a passport, he is a solar myth. Such is the official point of view, and the shortest way of demonstrating its fallacy would be a punch in the ribs from Mr Jones." Full of wit in spate, and tuned up to a high pitch as here and there it is, which is but proof of his great energy and buoyancy—what a lively Manual of Common Sense we have here! For all its demolishments, it is a happy book—caustic, wholesome and full of a sharp, clean wind. Lord, what a superb editor he would have made . . . an editor of some review whose strict function would be to keep our *How about Europe(s)* not only up to date but up to the mark as well—vigilantly so! An organ such as this would be unique.

1930: THREE OF THEM contains *One Day*, *Nerinda* and *On the Herpetology of the Grand Duchy of Baden*, all of them already described here. It was a new volume only in the sense that it appeared in this form, this trilogy of singularly different works becoming thus available to the general reader in an ordinary edition—*Nerinda* having been published in a signed, limited edition by Orioli; *One Day* in the same manner by me; and the *Herpetology* first in several numbers of *The Zoologist* in 1894.

1930: PANEROS—SOME WORDS ON APHRODISIACS AND THE LIKE was privately published for subscribers by Orioli in Florence, and the little volume, in the perfect taste of its dull gold paper boards, lies on my table—as pretty an object as some 18th-century gilt box. Open it anywhere and you find surprising items of expected erudition, nicely

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woven about with wit, all candidly presented, and that can be put into anyone's hands too! Eternal truths and ancient fantasies, time-consecrated, lead Douglas to engaging and salutary conclusions! If the word "Aphrodisiacs" suggest to some that the loves here treated are scabrous, those people are going to be disappointed. In his best, finely wrought and worked style are enumerated sundry venerable philtres, ichors and other love-inducing recipes to promote sexual vigour. Certain centuries have extolled the merits of this or that common or complex agent, while later centuries and different judges have considered the same to be negative; nay, even deflating . . . Chocolate and potatoes—Dear me, he asks, how so? I suggest that their supposed power comes rather from their rarity at the time; Shakespeare has mentioned vanilla in the same strain! How long have men not been aspiring to prolong virility—what can be more natural? "Be sure that he who set out on the Grand Enquiry, striving to concoct an Elixir of Life, purposed not to lengthen the days of a corpse awaiting burial. His aspirations were fanatical and beyond the bounds of achievement; nowise incongruous. He received a potion which should arrest decay and leave our organs firm-fixed in operation, eternally prompt to minister to our delight. He sought the Elixir of Youth. Why prolong life save to prolong pleasure?"* For some, aphrodisiacs are born in the mind, "in the rhythmical beats of music . . . by lascivious books or by their own hot daylight dreamings." Others have been provoked by "crafty whippings, frictions and urtications". The contemplation of images will appeal to religious ascetics, and "gallant embellishments of clothing" to more worldly persons. "Your Arab, wishful to excite his procreative faculties, devours the brayed relics of the skink, a desert creature." Tiger's testicles prepared in a special way have been used by some, and as for the mandrake: "It was the plant of Circe, an erotical witch, and its potency (was) such that it could infect with a fury of love so sagacious a beast as the elephant." Cress and nettle-seed for Petronius, tobacco for more modern times—madly contested, as it has been, by its votaries and antagonists, the former holding that "Its use diminished the suicidal tendencies in man, bred moral philosophers and theologians, and even cured the Neapolitan disease . . ." Douglas finds it "the scholar's ally; a sedative of the right kind, seeing that its action leaves untouched the centres of love." Opium,

*One—perhaps more—of the obituaries remembered that the day on which he died had been allotted this very thought by him in his *Almanac*.

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he says, was to him "a begetter of dreams, blissful, un-erotic; a contentment so plenary that to break in upon the trance with idle embracements were folly and almost impiety." And Indian Hemp, or Hashish (I venture to think that he tried Opium at the same time as Hashish in Tunisia) had for him no "aphrodisiacal effect, but only a sense of well-being, a genial shifting of the mind's perspective." (Were it but harmless! What more enticing, entrancing words to find on the chemist's wrapper?) Gems, too, have always been considered adjuncts to love: the bright red Coral "is esteemed as antidote to melancholy and favourable, therefore, to works of love. The pearl has ever been renowned for restoring the faculties of youth."

*"Eat Beef or Pye-crust if you'd serious be:
Your shell-fish raises Venus from the sea."*

Oysters and truffles are all very well and in high (stimulative) honour, but "Give heed to your stomach . . . No love-joy comes to bodies misfed." As for *Extensiveness of the Soul* (magnificent expression!), here is the quotation "from an earlier writer" "of one who complained: 'What hopes can there be of any Progress in Learning, whilst our Gentlemen suffer their sons at *Westminster, Eaton and Winchester* to eat nothing but *Salt* with their *Mutton* and *Vinegar* with their *Roast Beef* upon Holidays? What extensiveness can there be in their Souls?'" An 18th-century view, one surmises; incidentally, all of *Paneros* is written in a sort of decorous 18th-century rhythm, while the flavour of its wisdom—universal but never sufficiently recognised as such—is also preeminently his: "A fasting stomach and a full one have nothing in common save this: both are enemies to Love." What about Wine? It has been praised "as the ally of lovers . . . it will break down defences; it unbridles and cheers, allaying fear in bashful natures, and thawing those of the frigid kind. More than this wine cannot do. In the hands of a Master it will suffice." And then come some thoughts about the advisability of choosing the battleground—its place and hour and tactics—"whether victory shall come from a siege, a sharp frontal attack, or sagaciously pondered flanking movements." What an adorable little book it is, with its three main themes: the long list of Aphrodisiacs throughout the ages, well documented and richly commented on; and then a progression of thoughts on the splendid reaction of Nature (best of stimulants) to the effects of good, sound food; last

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of all: Let us enjoy what we are meant to enjoy—Life and its companion, love, which is its natural corollary. Imagine what such a subject could have been (indeed, must be) in the hands of others—some heavy German *Afrodisiakenskunst im Lebensdienst* with its ponderous tabulations in hardly readable and quite undigestible volumes of encyclopaedic size! What a morass of unrelated particles all this could be—with no application whatsoever to life! Douglas has made of it what may even be termed “a neat catalogue” and, at the same time, a most lovely, individual work of art, enchanting in presentation, perfect in choice and in scale.

1930: CAPRI—MATERIALS FOR A DESCRIPTION OF THE ISLAND. Dedicated to Compton Mackenzie. No title was ever more exact, for Douglas did not intend it to be thought of as a book to be read right through, but as a source to be consulted on various matters all of which pertain to the island of Capri. It is a matrix, packed with concise diversities, an Encyclopedia, or Library of Capri lore, beautifully and sumptuously printed for discerning subscribers—vide the Index to these Monographs first published between 1904 and 1915 and somewhat rearranged and enlarged here. They go as follows: *The Blue Grotto and its Literature*. *Forestal Conditions*. *Fabio Giordano's Relation of Capri*. *The lost Literature of Capri*. *Tiberius*. *Saracens and Corsairs*. *The Life of Suor Serafina di Dio*. *Some Antiquarian Notes*. *Dissecta Membra*. *Index*. The seeds of such intensive research and collating blossomed in several other books of his: *Tiberius* is in *Siren Land*; so is that excruciating story of *Suor Serafina*; and legends about Sirens (two of whom were taken from the sea in the Middle Ages, one, according to report, living ashore to a great old age in Holland, in 1407!). *The lost Literature of Capri* (no wonder so much of it was lost) tells of the violent history of the small island where an enemy sail was the alarming prelude to many a hideous consummation and archives, municipal and episcopal “were repeatedly burnt or scattered during the piratical incursions of the Middle Ages.” Venerable parchments vanished in other unpredictable avatars, being sold “as wrapping paper”, and the like. Of native poets there seems to have been but one, F. Alberino. Of local and historical interest, who else but Sir Hudson Lowe, whose life was saved here by an Italian during certain military mis-adventures before his governorship of St Helena? Among more recent lost literature are many writings of the Englishman, Wreford, “illustrative of Capri history during the last years of the Bourbon mis-administration”. As for *Saracens and Corsairs*,

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they were equally detested by the island people, who, on account of their assaults were even forced to change the site of their capital which stood first on sea level, on that very Marina Grande where one now lands. No wonder the archives and how much else disappeared during *one thousand years* of resistance to piratical attack—from 830 to 1830! "These piratical incursions depopulated the island not only directly by the capture of prisoners," (he says) "but indirectly by frightening the inhabitants away to Naples and other safe spots . . . Saracenic types are not rare, and, like other Oriental strains, persistent." Violent enough were the visits of the Corsairs, but "a change of wind, the appearance of an Italian sail, an unexpected resistance on the part of the inhabitants sufficed to unsettle their ephemeral plans." Not so with the Saracens, who at times must have dominated the island. Indeed, "where they dined they slept"! Botany, Forestry, Buried Antiquities . . . how much research is here . . . Geological considerations, Zoology—and what of this: "I was particularly interested in the iconography of the island . . . My zeal evaporated on the day when my library of Capri books was sold, together with the prints it contained." A motley company of writers, all connected one way or the other with Capri, is enumerated: Fabio Giordano, one of its early historians, "a man of stupendous and varied erudition who died in 1539" (the words apply rather well to Douglas); Wordsworth and Longfellow, the German Gregorovius: *Tod des Tiberius*—1851—"A mistake from a dramatic point of view . . . The reader is left with nothing but a kind of *intellectual* pity for the monster".) Ouida, to whom Capri was "an Eden hung betwixt sky and sea". (It is easy to see how this must have been the case at the time of her visit.) D'Haussez in 1835: the colour-effect of the Blue Grotto was that of "a lamp placed behind a bowl of sulphate of copper". In 1850, an illustration here elaborates it: "diluted Prussic Acid blue". There is, in 1870, by M. Healy, *A Summer Romance*, which causes Douglas to write: "The usual thing. Love-scene in the Green Grotto for a change." And H. G. Wells brings Capri into *A Dream of Armageddon*. It was Douglas himself who urged Compton Mackenzie to "come and try Capri". What ensued were some very frequent, very happy and very lengthy moments in each other's company here and the writing of those famous novels *Vestal Fire* and *Extraordinary Women* (dedicated to Norman Douglas). A succinct modern description of the island is in these few lines: "Capri has changed since I first landed here on the 26th of March 1888. In those days it still possessed some of the dreami-

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ness and remoteness for which it has been famed. It was a restful place, full of lovable freaks of various nationalities who lived contentedly on next to nothing, gave each other unpretentious dinner-parties, and took no heed of the annual invasion of Teutronics whom Allers has immortalised in some of his drawings of that period . . . Capri was discovered by Neapolitans, much as the Lake District was discovered by Liverpudlians, and with much the same result: it grew into a playground for flamboyant trippers." With Teutons and strident flamboyance, as is now the case, let the last word be for a mute and beautiful native (for, indeed, such exist as well)—that exquisite lizard so dear to Douglas, of whom legend says that it drew him again and again till at length it held him to this island. There is a ravishing picture here, in colours, of the darling creature: the Lizard of the Faraglione Rocks.

1931: SUMMER ISLANDS—Two beautiful long essays written years before, full of grace and with a curious sort of moonstone quality which turns later into the most exuberant mineral tones imaginable—those terrific passages on the multicoloured rocks of Ponza. These are Mediterranean islands and islets off Naples: *Ischia* and *Ponza*, *Vivara* and *Procida*, *Zannone* and *Palmarola*, *Ventotene* and *San Stefano*—isles of volcanic beauty, some; others, of oblivion, banishment and suffering. You see *Ischia* from Capri, and everyone knows this is where Typhoëus, enchained (in Greek mythology) under the very rocks, is perpetually striving to be free—which, of course, accounts for the earthquakes. How informative Douglas is; his *multum in parvo* method here encompasses every one of the local subjects, from geology to human nature. One is almost walking and scrambling all over these volcanic places with him, in a fragrance of herbs spangled with wild orchids and bright butterflies: the Clouded Yellow it was that came around him in hosts, attracted, probably, by the vapours of certain "hidden volcanic vents", as he sat near one of these, thinking of a Flemish gentleman who would never drink save out of doors here, but drank very copiously then, because "where there is no landscape I drink without pleasure". The very word: Landscape! Landscape all on sides: in luxuriant outbursts of flowers, and all around the white orchids that encircle the dead crater of Monte Rotaro; in evocations, even, of what the miraculous sand-baths and healing-springs must have looked like when Iasolini wrote about them in 1580, when they were thought to be "cure alls" for every ailment. Even the colossal earthquake of 1883

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turns into landscape; he sees the ruins now overgrown and plants pushing the stones apart, and, among other agencies of the gentle demolitions of nature, records this unforgettable thing: "One day, two lizards fighting as is their wont, in an inextricable knot of legs and tails, tumble upon a loosened block, and down it comes." Thoughts about the Ischiotes: very honest people and very clean; they whitewash their houses constantly and "are to some extent a mixed race; (they) lack the full-blooded homogeneity of the people of Vesuvius." Of this *Mezzogiorno* he says: "South Italians who prate of mechanics but are true lovers of the soil; the keynote of their nature is anti-asceticism." Spirits in caves and buried treasure abound, and if the Greeks and Romans are "elusive shapes" in the gulf of time, what may better recall them than those barnacle-encrusted amphoras so pure in line, which the sea will now and again yield? On *Vivara* the air is ambrosial; from here one may behold all of Campania in a swathe of mythological names: the Cape of Circe, the Caudine Forks, the Elysian Fields, Tartarus and Cimmerian gloom. *Ponza* is otherwise, a place once dedicated to banishments from imperial Rome: "The Romans burrowed like moles all over Ponza. They had little else to do, poor devils. They were exiles, one and all." Here they died of hunger—the natives hold that the island's very name comes from the banishment of Pontius Pilate. Here long before Rome were the Volscians, and the legend of the companions of Ulysses changed "into bristly wine". Later came "pale Christian martyrs" and, in 1908, the year of his visit, "about 300 condemned malefactors" were held here in very safe keeping. On *Zannone*, a few trees still; *Palmorola* is "rugged cliff scenery" hardly more than sea-rocks. But *Ventotene* and *San Stefano* have always been places of horror and oblivion. On the first perished Octavia, the young wife of Nero, whereas the second is like this: "Steep and menacing . . . a penitentiary . . . triple murderers, many of them . . . Their novitiate consists of solitary confinement within a cell of 3 metres long for periods varying from 7 to 10 years; a living death in darkness and silence. The survivors are set to life-long hard labour." (In 1908, at least.) And what a bitter contrast is this: "Time flies fast on Ponza; to judge, at least, by the behaviour of the town clock. In the course of five minutes during which we were held spell-bound by its movements, the fingers had progressed from about midday to seven in the evening. My companion, who has a genius for higher mathematics, kindly calculated for me how long the clock, going at this vertiginous pace,

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would take to scamper through the year; I have unfortunately mislaid the result. A priest happened to be passing and ventured the explanation that this exhibition of breathless haste was purposely arranged in order to give the citizens of Ponza some idea of the meaning of the word Progress . . ." I have never read anything that made me exclaim so quickly: "I want to go to these places! I want to see them—all!"

1933: LOOKING BACK. "The winter of my days has come. I have attained the Grand Climacteric. Now, if ever, is the time to take that promenade into the past and into regions which I shall never see again." And a grand device it is (or *was* it?) to have had all come out of one beautiful old bowl—a tidy packet, several decades-worth of the cards of people who called on him in a number of countries, every one of which indicates that there is something to be said . . . I have had this bowl in my own hands—a most handsome ancient Japanese affair in bronze, with an enchanting little dog atop, given him, long ago, as he tells, by a lovely Cuban lady in commemoration of certain tender, and other testy, passages between them on the score of her pet dog. Into it went all the visiting-cards. And now, out they all come, higgie-piggie—as simple as that! A very adroit, if completely disjointed way of being autobiographical. (Never mind about the disjointedness—an academic objection for some old-fashioned pedant to raise!) No one is too eminent, no one too *terre à terre*, providing they are all in that bowl and recall something of interest. (One can see what a dangerous game this would be in the hands of someone with "the novelist's touch", some self-advancing sciolist!) A memory-fair of years and journeys, of personalities and situations, of a few mysteries, even, that remained inexorable to their very end. And if some of the names bring forth a "Who the Hell can *this* have been?", others lead him into some long, limpid sequence, and yet others become so many hooks for the beautiful fabrics of digressions—of digressions and facts and accounts attendant on his Karlsruhe Gymnasium period, when he was learning Russian prior to the Diplomatic Service—what one might call "the *Sheltopusik* sequence". Put this, with the long and rich memories of St Petersburg, alongside of that Russia-filled essay on Marie Bashkirtseff in *Experiments* and the astonishing chapter in *South Wind* that describes that old mystic leader of The Little White Cows, and you have a magnificent evocation of Russia before the Revolution. Not an intended *description*, as such, but something utterly unique and, doubtless, psychologically true. (I wonder if anyone has ever thought of this before—even

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Douglas? I hope he does not mind that it has suddenly occurred to me.) One would like to know infinitely more about his life in St Petersburg in the middle nineties; alas, that is not to be. One sees here how well he got on with the great vitality and originality of the Russian character . . . Well, here is all life at one go—"total recall". (We may be sure it is not, nothing can ever be that; but it is very full all the same.) Names and subjects send him off at the most informative and diverting of tangents. There are also the first two chapters of a novel which he was writing with great facility and at top speed, near Baalbek in 1928: *Love among the Ruins* (a cigar-smoking sort of "County" lady with her Lesbian—all very gay and light and respectable enough) but the tale got no further. He left, and the mood left—in another direction; he seems to have destroyed the rest . . . Here is Krupp, the richest man in Europe at the beginning of this century, a much maligned man—he says—a great benefactor to Capri and "a passionate explorer of marine biology". There is a fine description of Douglas's Villa Maya, with a photograph, and pages that evoke his life here then. Another picture is of the family seat near Banchory, Scotland: Tilquhillie Castle. Another: the song a fisherman sang to him in the Bay of Naples, a small, unknown melody of Wagner's—no less. There are chunks of reminiscing, every one of them most interesting, and it all takes a while to assimilate—Naples and East Africa, Conrad, and Maupassant on Lipari (*La Vie Errante*), the Messina earthquake and *The English Review*, Gorki, and Baron Corvo and Rupert Brooke—and Mrs Webb (the original of the "indestructibles"), bountiful, fantastic, American Mrs Webb. And what about Lady Isabella? She had worn a *golden* wig for fifty years. And now "while she was travelling from London to Brighton with one of her daughters . . . Now, on issuing from a tunnel it was seen to be white." Amazement was given its cue: "'Not another word, my dear'". Other vivid, *fin de siècle* characters are here too! We learn that he had yet another language to his credit: he "chattered modern Greek" at the age of twenty-three on arrival in Corfu, Patras and Athens. In 1920—he says—all of it was forgotten, unrecapturable too. How good he is on D. H. Lawrence, so incisive and clear; things like this: Despite all else, "His work is in the nature of a beneficent, tabu-shattering bomb . . . He opened a little window for the bourgeoisie. That is his life-work." Excellent passages follow about W. H. Hudson and Charles Doughty. He would meet the former, in his *English Review* period, at the Mont Blanc Restaurant in Soho: "It was a

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surprise to me that the author of books like *La Plata* and *Green Mansions* and those others, so delicately phrased and so full of original observations, should still be so badly off. I begin to understand nowadays." He goes to see Doughty ("benignly patriarchal") because *The English Review* was longing for articles by him. But Doughty said he had never contributed to the periodical press; for fifty-five years he had laboured without cease at his *Arabia Deserta*, the *Dawn in Britain* and other works of the kind. Of Frank Harris, Douglas says that this "thick-skinned adventurer . . . possessed one noble quality which is becoming extinct in England—a heartfelt and outspoken reverence for all that is admirable in art or literature." Everyone and everything here is evoked by someone's card, and his memory has taken him to so many times and places that it is impossible to describe the impression one gets from such a grandly cosmic stretch. A great deal more is added to what one may know of Douglas; for someone beginning to read him, maybe this, one of his most important books, would be the best to read first of all. Maybe it is here, most of all, that he seems to be "timeless"—by which I suppose I mean 'a sort of consecration of permanence and durability'. Here is one shaft on his own craft in writing: "My creed is that a human character, however engrossing, however convincing and true to itself, must be modelled anew before it become material for fiction. It must be licked into shape, otherwise its reactions, in a world of fictitious characters, would be out of focus. No authentic child of man will fit into a novel. History is the place for such people; history or oblivion." And, although this was written before 1933, maybe the double edge it has acquired for us was already divivable to him: "Only recently have we discerned that minute things may be pregnant with greatness. The microscope opened up new worlds of wonder. What a conception is that of the germ-plasm: the whole of man contained in a structure as small as a grain of sand! We subdivide, and find no end. This should make us humble before the Infinitely Little. Reverence the Atom! Such is the watchword of our generation." The double edge that today has put so violently on the Atom liberated—what shall one wish to that? Let other words of Douglas follow right here, and my corollary will be clear to all: "One can always trust to time. Insert a wedge of time, and nearly everything straightens itself out."

1941: AN ALMANAC. (Only twenty-five copies were printed in the original edition of this work, says a note in it, but there have been two other editions since, and it is to be found in the shops.)

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The idea came to him while for a year in Lisbon (1940-41) as the guest of one of the secretaries of the British Embassy, the Hon. Neil Hogg, to whom it is dedicated, of making a collection—one for every day of the year and, I suppose, chance-allotted—of the sundry axioms, maxims, observations, conclusions, epigrams, apothegms and thoughts (some of them plain and others purl!) that are in all of his books. They were chosen from such works of his as he could find in this place of enforced waiting. This mustering of felicitously-phrased truths—Douglasian and general—is a-sparkle with pithily-worded facets, and also contains many finely complex thoughts that leave one *tout à fait réveur*. Naturally, a triple-extract such as this is so rich that . . . the phrase must end with whatever symbol of richness be liked best. Apart from this, Douglas is obviously one of the most articulate writers of all time in any language, and it is here that fact is most immediately visible.

At random, the book opening where it will:

"When two good folks put their heads together you may be prepared for the worst."

"A plague has infected the world—the plague of repression."

"Duty has become the Moloch of daily life."

"Our gods reflect the hearts that make them."

"No authentic child of man will fit into a novel. History is the place for such people; history or oblivion."

"Honest men are sometimes hard to please. I have met two or three."

"In the usefulness of truth lies the hope of humanity."

Some are smacking strictures—the one that falls on my birthday, for instance!

His own—I do not think, somehow, that it was chance-allotted: "I have better uses for my leisure than to try to bring others round to any convictions of mine, such as they are."

Or else, chance fell plumb on to truth here.

1946: LATE HARVEST. It gave him endless trouble to find the title, and, remembering the many times he talked to me about it in 1944 and 1945, the search must have gone on for months! A beautiful title—one with "the inevitable ring" to it—words he uses for the spare beauty of Greek poetry. A title should embrace the whole theme and should, as it were, fall from the sky plumb on to the book. This one certainly embraces and contains all the meaning of this fascinating,

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lively, instructive, self-revealing, cumulative and culminating spread of writing. Let me call it his crown. Seventeen of his books are commented on here, lengthily, and the whole of *Summer Islands*, mercifully, is reproduced—mercifully because the *de luxe* Corvinus Press edition in 1944 and the 1931 one produced by Desmond Harmsworth, must be unobtainable—although who knows if this *Late Harvest*, published by Lindsay Drummond, is still available or not? Some of the incisive book-reviews of his *English Review* period are reprinted here. And the Index, as usual, is a joy: "Books, privately printed, a troublesome but lucrative hobby; remaindered or pulped without consulting author; autographed, what happens to them." "Mystics, female, prefer a human Christ." Among the circumstances of the writing of all his books, he tells of our little trip together to Tunisia in 1938, and records any number of things that all, in one way or another, attended the making or reshaping or publication of his works. Paradoxically, one forgets, in fact, that one is reading about books that one has read already—so new and fresh are all the items he has remembered here! *Gleanings* . . . Maybe the title came to him from long musing around this cue. This work makes one think ardently that anyone who can write with a modicum of talent—human and literary-historical—should unquestionably, at some time or other, set down all of the circumstances in which his books came to him and were issued later to the world! How much ground will be covered thus—a picture of the times, glimpses into the soul, mind and temper of the author; his dealings with who knows how many different kinds of people; the changing rhythms of life, and so on. I am not going to make the slightest attempt at describing the contents further: it would be an impertinence as he has done it all so beautifully himself, and I seem to hear him at this very moment: "Leave it alone! If people are interested they can see what I have to say when they read it for themselves." Indeed yes, he has dealt here with his usual brilliance and thoroughness and in very pleasing proportions indeed, with the entire surroundings of what I am struggling to do in this sort of "potted extract" manner with all of his books. For which may he forgive me! *On fait ce qu'on peut.*

1952: FOOTNOTE ON CAPRI—(*With 48 Photographs by Islay Lyons*). Published four months after his death, this enchanting small volume begins: "Not long ago I thought to have closed my little writing-shop for good and all. A glance at these admirable photographs made me change my mind". No wonder they took his fancy with their technique

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and individuality, pictures of Capri from all angles, houses, stretches, slopes and dangerous, alluring rocks. Now over eighty—how fitting that his last book (save for the recipes of Venus!) should be this one to close the circle of his love which began in these parts with *Siren Land*. Ending thus with Capri, the full cycle of the student, scholar and connoisseur of these Mediterranean reaches and of Italy is complete. What *can* he find to say that is new, he who has written so much about it already? Quite a lot. And so, even a new facet of him is revealed: his art in concise, informative writing: all that you want to know in a mere forty-two pages, his mind and taste as lucid as ever, the shapely, easy style as firm-edged as one of those alabaster cups that managed, despite all the avatars of life and of war, to stay with him to the very end. What was Capri long ago? Probably attached to the mainland; remains of animals and of "imported artefacts" suggest this, after "the Phlegrean eruptions which convulsed the whole Neapolitan region". Important discoveries by Dr Ignazio Cerio, leading citizen of the island, in 1906 . . . Remains of animals *so numerous and so varied* that if Capri "was an island at this time with all these beasts congregated on the smaller regions down below, the place must have been a kind of Noah's Ark"! For "though elephants are passable climbers, the cliffs of Anacapri will have been too much for them"! Of Antiquity he himself found many an object in the ground and gave "a celt of jadeite unearthed with some other materials on the Castiglione hill" to the local Museum. Capri was first discovered for Rome by the Emperor Augustus—as Suetonius relates—and many are the sites of imperial villas, their works of art now in museums and collections, and even more of the antiquities lost or destroyed. Under Tiberius the island became the centre of all that world, and Suetonius with his descriptions of this Emperor "has been of the greatest use to the tourist traffic of Capri, even if such were not his original intention". Those victims thrown over cliffs, orgiastic grottoes, wild games and violences in the waters are so much gold to the guides of today, (and no one who has seen the hordes of Teutons that descend continually here will have a moment's doubt about it—they and their prototypes from everywhere else!) There are gaps in history, many "pious fables" and records of Christian times that begin in the 6th century. Soon after, San Costanzo, the patron saint, was kept busy trying to hold off the Saracens—1,000 years of that! So malign were their piratical assaults that Douglas thinks they may well have altered the very character of Capri by

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causing the construction of those tunnel-like passages which could be barricaded and blocked on the spot. He tells of the Latin, Arab and later historians; of the Great Plague of 1656 and the rivalry between Capri and Anacapri; of its birds, plants and fishes; of travellers' impressions. Those of the 17th century Frenchman, Bouchard, have been beautifully printed and published by that erudite Edwin Cerio, son of the founder of the Library and Museum. Here came, among so many others, Joseph Addison and Montesquieu—who was entertained by the monks of the Certosa, there being no inns then, but wine a-plenty and fine cheer. As for the Blue Grotto, known already to the Romans, its world-wide fame is relatively recent. "It has made Capri . . . created hotels, steamboats and driving-roads . . . built the funicular railway, dappled the island with the villas of eccentric strangers; studded the lovely seashores with caves fancy-tinted like Joseph's coat . . ." Foreigners love coloured caves? Others come into being forthwith—green, red and white grottoes! Those once shoeless and hatless goatherds transformed some time since into urban, urbane proprietors, etc., the island's industries—he says—have practically been gathered up into one. So Viva la Grotta Azurra! Viva il Turismo! And, remembering all that Douglas, in his many writings, has done for the island, be not too surprised if you go there and happen to ask anyone (as I have) who is of the place if he knew Douglas, to hear immediately the words "Viva sempre la memoria del Signore Douglas!" They all here knew him, and they all loved him—all.

1952: VENUS IN THE KITCHEN—posthumously published—with a very nice photograph of Douglas and Orioli on a walking-tour in the Vorarlberg, as Douglas-Pilaff-Bey says in his Preface, was in preparation for years, and, as indicated by the title, this rich collection of special recipes (drink, too) culled by him and Orioli from sundry local ancient and (probably) personal sources with "many items" from the collection of Lady Compton Mackenzie, is dedicated to the promotion of amorous fervours. Hard to bear in mind that all are supposedly aphrodisiacal! Such great dishes and subtle concoctions also seem to belong to the "spacious ages" rather than to our own, that of the unostentatious pellet. Athenean Eels and Eel-full *Scavecilaff*, Artichoke Bottoms and Giant Stuffed Peppers, and Black Risotto ("clean well half a lb. of cuttlefish")—How much tongue-in-cheek have we here—there must be *some*? "Take a well-trussed crane" is an order no one is likely to forget. And *Ginestrata* and *Faiscedda* and Sparrow's Brains. Towards the

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end comes something called "Hysterical Water". Oysters and teal, boars and sturgeon, nuts and niblets, Muscovy this and Tartar that and Bombay something else, all done up in musc and *béchamel* and Latin and Calabrian and French and curry and all the rest, with just that little extra *something* about them . . . There may yet be people rich enough to afford the time and money to spend on gathering rare eggs and procuring little fishes from distant waters and other unusual adjuncts for some of these Gargantuan—and lesser—dishes and distilling of triple extracts. But what, then? Have we the right Wagnerian scale—or is the Field of the Cloth of Gold easier to evoke, the Rome of the Papal Borgias? These seem the correct setting, for such dishes should go with *panache* if not with *braggadoccio*! And, come to think of it, many of these eruditely tabulated mysteries must date from such times, and from high Antiquity as well: appetizers for Henry VIII and François Ier and Charles Quint; things to prick the Knights into action of another kind after the exhausting jousts and head-splitting politics. An aquamarine liquor in a crystalline cup—the strychnine cocktail of the Renaissance? A thoughtfully prepared bachelors' dinner *à deux* will benefit from one of those aristocratic, silk-like, celerified soups; for homely nut-arrangements, correct dosage must not be overlooked. Who's for a lush *fool*, a *crème* with a secret to it? The recipes evoke a sunburst of colours as well: prawns and beet and purple slaw, tomatoes and *demi-devil*, surrounded by all the emerald and *Eau de Nil* and *vert-pomme* greens in nature; dark red meats intervene with some furiously-contrasting sauce, and the strange tints of tiny iridescent creatures fainting in coils around some portentous and occult *suprême*. Such, at least, is the general effect after a few pages. Or—in another mood—what about the essential gland of a skink from the Arabian desert? Pervading aromas are here—male, female and fairylike spices—onions, garlicks, Tabascan peppers, housewifely ginger, cinnamon and cloves, sage and fennel—orris-root too, maybe . . . You like his stew? In his Introduction to it, Graham Greene says that he "operates" cunningly and rapidly; and then he makes a horrifying comparison with something quite different, although this view of Douglas is perfect: "That sudden laugh would break like an explosion in a quarry, over before the noise had reached you." Naturally, *Venus in the Kit(chen)* will not be of point (except as reading up "for another day") while you, in your solitude, are flinging together some unpretentious stave-off-collapse to stagger up to bed with on a tray after six hours or more of uninterrupted writing

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or typing. That is not its function. Although what better—as meticulously and discreetly prepared as may be *by someone else*—on such occasions than one of those nerve pick-me-ups in which the book abounds? It is (let us hope it *is being*) an ideal collection for *la vie de château* (which, in France, is well on the way to a *dolce far niente*)—for the return of the drenched hunters and hungry shots to castle or manse, where all the guests will soon be gathered round the blaze after such an unexpectedly *good* dinner before retiring to other pursuits above. Obviously (why not share a good thing?) these recipes should be tried out by as many people as possible in circumstances propitious to mental and corporal ease. Of solace to bridge-playing clubmen . . . of interest to enterprising and discriminating stockbrokers . . . On the whole, one might also try them on one's publishers (if one be on such terms): "Can you get a grebe up from your fen next week, so that we may test the accuracy of No. 169 all together? I think I have got the sauce right"—something like that maybe! To anyone faced unexpectedly with stuffed boar's head or sting-ray out of season served in Westphalian sauce *mariné* for six days, *relevé'd* with just a soupçon of garlic and well-seasoned hormones—to anyone of doubting or cantankerous nature who might explode into Douglas's own frequent "*Preposterous! What next!*" one should counter-quote his equally apposite "No harm in *trying*, you know, no harm at all in trying . . ." A French artist, on seeing this book for the first time, became greatly excited, exclaiming "That is *just* what I need!", and soon after receiving it, pronounced himself delighted at the satisfactory result ("Besides, it *tasted* so good") of the ticklesome dish he had been so easily able to make. And of course Douglas would say "it should be kept up to date"—along with sundry other matters—limericks, for one. It is good to think that, in his last book of all, he should be passing on to posterity two elements that enriched his own life: knowledge and good cheer! So be it. *Hic jacet* reposes here on both.

Well, to sum up after all this diversity:

Norman Douglas is most important as a writer and his influence on other writers has already been stated and discussed in a good many places. He affords the greatest pleasure to all readers with any feeling for character and style, and to any number more who would be hard put to say what style is. To those, his charm and inventiveness suffice.

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His personality is ever present, his way of writing of an ease and freshness all along. One is fascinated, in all of his books, by the way his mind runs. And, on top of all the rest is that quality which makes him a constructive critic . . . If he is often damning, he is perpetually bracing too! And is that not the apogee of good criticism?

I am thinking of him very much, also, from a writer's point of view, because his way of *making* induces one to ponder lengthily thereon: *making*. He impels one to reflect on how the art and the craft of writing and the writer's mind, character and taste must all come together—by some mysterious alchemy—into that concrete and final flow of current which is called *style*. To anyone with thoughts about becoming a worthwhile writer, it seems to me that Douglas can be a most helpful and engaging master! There are few rules to his lore: Try to think straight! Write close and tightly. Avoid sentimentality and rhetoric. Be original, and always (that fascinating term of his) "non-derivative"!

My last thought about him is this, as my mind turns again and ever to those two phrases of his already quoted here:

"Like all artists she (Isabelle Eberhardt) detects colours and shapes invisible to the common eye." "Learn to foster an ardent imagination; so shall you decry beauty that others pass unheeded."

How perfectly this applied to him in his life and to all of his work. And, of course, the result—once again—is a great artist, whose signature is to be found in these very words.

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